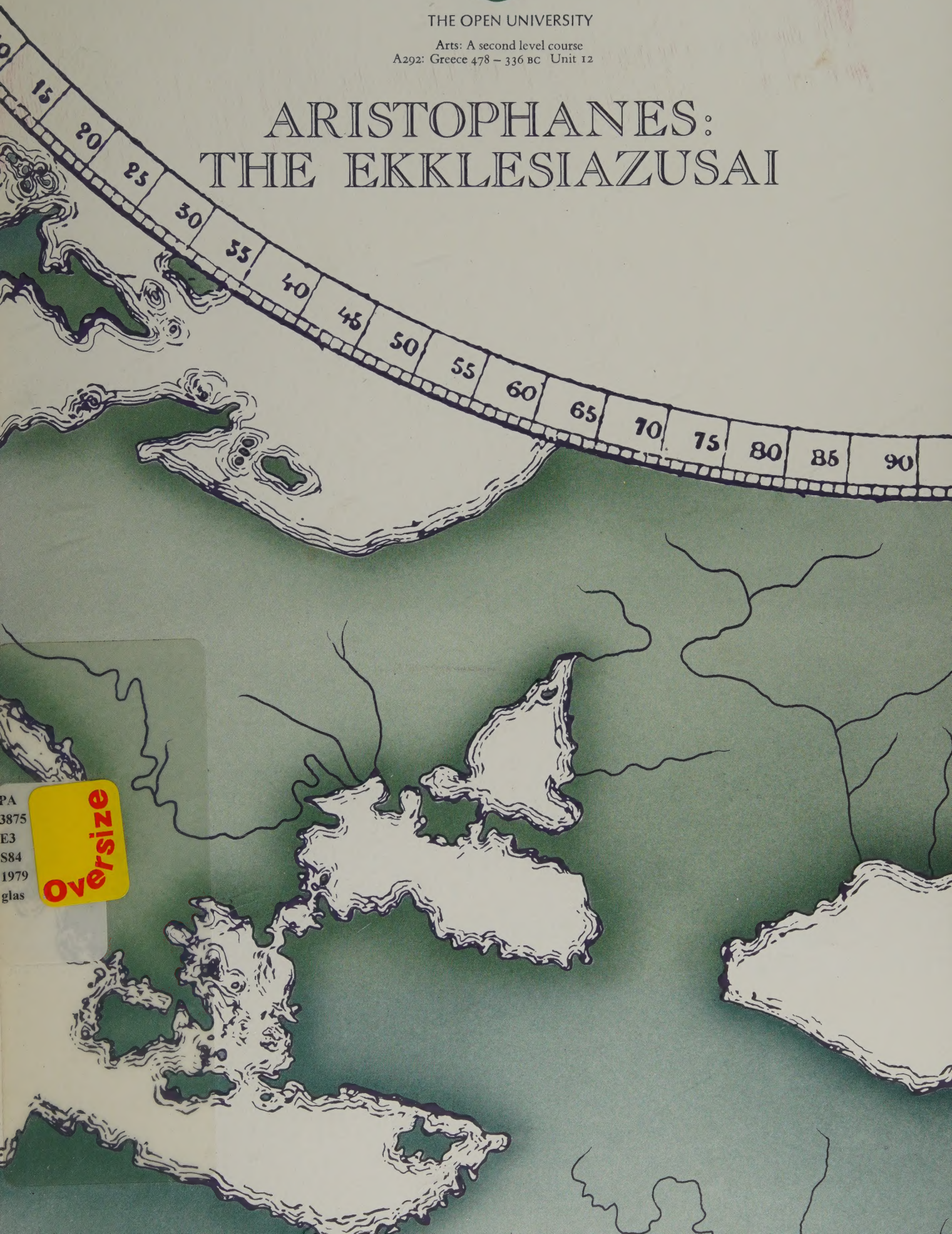




THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Arts: A second level course
A292: Greece 478 – 336 BC Unit 12

ARISTOPHANES: THE EKKLESIAZUSAI



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ARISTOPHANES: THE EKKLESIAZUSAI

Prepared for the course team by David Sewart

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INTRODUCTION

You have read a sequence of three tragedies by Aeschylus and one by Euripides. From your reading of these plays you will have in your mind a concept of tragedy which is being further developed by what you have read in the units. You can now see Greek tragedy against the background of Greek political, social and art history and, although *Medea* (431)¹ was written only twenty-seven years after *Oresteia*, you will have noted considerable differences. Euripides clearly belongs to a different era in which all the principles of morality and religion were tested by public examination. Euripides introduced into his plays the same questioning and searching after truth which the sophists employed. The fact that he employed the Theatre of Dionysos for this examination rather than the streets of Athens, brought him into disrepute in some quarters where he was compared unfavourably with Aeschylus and Sophocles.

The early plays of Aristophanes belong to the same age of ideas. We might assume that those who found Euripides' work novel, interesting and challenging would be the same as those who appreciated the satire of Aristophanes. If you have time you might care to read briefly through one of the earlier plays of Aristophanes merely to get the feel of that form of comedy which existed in parallel with the new tragedy of Euripides. The radio broadcast concentrates on the earlier plays and should give you a good background for further reading.

Ekklesiazusai, 'The Women in Assembly', belongs to a later age. In some ways it is as far removed from the early plays of Aristophanes as Euripides is from Aeschylus but it must be viewed against its own background of the political and social history of the early fourth century.

Since you have already studied the background, I would advise you to read through the play fairly quickly now. You will find that you will often be referring to your knowledge of the social and political history. In my notes on the play I have tried to provide you with an explanation of some of the comments and allusions which you might not otherwise notice. However, don't get too involved in the details of the notes at the moment; read the play for itself.

¹Please note that all dates are to be regarded as BC unless otherwise indicated or when clearly inappropriate.

Alexandrian scholars in the second century were the first to divide Greek comedy into three periods: old comedy, middle comedy and new comedy. These divisions are by no means rigid but they do serve to denote a major change, both in structure and content, ranging from burlesque and farce to a comedy of manners. If we try to give dates to this tripartite division we might suggest a change from old to middle comedy after the fall of Athens (404) and a change from middle to new comedy in the age of Alexander, signified for us by the production of Menander's first play in 321. We must remember, however, that these dates are very fluid. What would appear to the Greeks as a continuum of development in which major change was visible only over a long period, can be seen by us in three sections, first, because we have the benefit of hindsight, and secondly, and much more importantly, because the extant works of two centuries of Greek comedy are so meagre that differences are magnified.

For old comedy the only complete plays we have are nine of Aristophanes, for middle comedy we have only the last two plays of Aristophanes, for new comedy we have one complete play of Menander and considerable portions of four further plays. The rest of Greek comedy has come down to us in fragments, sometimes only single lines or even single words, more rarely, sizeable portions of up to one hundred lines.

Briefly, we might say that as far as old comedy is concerned personal invective and obscenity appear to have been major distinguishing elements. Such personal invective could be against politicians—Perikles, Kleon, Alkibiades and other popular politicians were the frequent butt of Aristophanes' wit—or any other personalities in the public eye including poets, Euripides in particular, and philosophers, notably Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. The plots of these plays vary from the highly imaginative to the fantastic. Old comedy is often referred to as political comedy and we must beware of the modern connotations of this description. Old comedy does not deal exclusively with current politics although, as I have already mentioned, politicians were one of its sources of material. 'Political' refers to the close associations of comedy and the everyday life of the polis.

Personal invective certainly did not disappear in middle comedy and is present particularly in the early part of the fourth century. There is a tendency, however, for invective against contemporary individuals to change to invective against types, philosophers in general, parasites, gluttons, etc. Detailed observation of these contemporary types was a major characteristic of the middle period. Obscenity rapidly waned and, as far as we can determine, was almost completely discarded by the end of the period, although, as you will see, it is still present in abundance in *Ekklesiazusai* which is an early play of the middle period. With its stress upon character types and contemporary manners, middle comedy of necessity was moving away from the fantastic plots of old comedy into something which resembled, or might resemble, the real life situation, but it is only in new comedy that we see this move completed. We can no longer refer to middle comedy as political. It does not spring wholly from the association of the genre with the life of the polis. Reference was still made to contemporary events and people but such reference was now of secondary importance.

It is new comedy which presented for the first time the so called 'comedy of manners' or 'situation comedy' which is the basis of European comic drama (see § 7). Here we find a narrow topic, the adventures or escapades of young love. The individual rôles in the play are stereotyped and relatively few in number. Rich or poor they represent neither the famous nor the infamous; only the undistinguished. Political comedy has disappeared completely in new comedy. In the extant works of Menander we possess scarcely a reference to contemporary events and the chaos of the time. We should not be led astray by the much quoted remarks of the eminent Greek critic Aristophanes of Byzantium, 'Oh Menander, Oh life! which of you is the mirror of the other!' It is not the contemporary life of the polis which Menander reflects — far from it. He captures the reflection of basic human strengths and weaknesses, of relationships and sympathies.

2 THE ORIGINS OF GREEK COMEDY

The history of the development of Greek comedy, like that of Greek tragedy (see Units 3 and 4, § 2) is obscure. What is known — or at least not contested — is the source from which comedy sprang. Aristotle tells us that comedy sprang from improvisations originating in the phallic ceremonies which still survived as institutions in many cities in his day. Such phallic ceremonies were intended primarily to secure fertility and I will be referring to this element in my later consideration of costumes in comedy (see p. 21).

As to the various stages of development there is little certainty as Aristotle tells us:

The changes in the development of tragedy and those who were responsible for them have not been lost but comedy was lost because it was not at first taken seriously. Indeed it was only quite late on that the Archon provided a chorus of comic performers — they had been volunteers. By the time the comic poets I have referred to appear on the scene, comedy already had certain forms. It is not known who gave it masks or prologues or number of actors and other such things. The development of the plot came in the beginning from Sicily but Krates was the first of the Athenians to move away from the lampooning form and generally to develop themes and plots. (*Poetics* 1449a 37–b9.)

Thus early comedy developed out of the chorus of revellers who took part in the early phallic ceremonies. When an actor was added a simple plot could be devised and, as the plot developed, more actors were required. By the time of Aristophanes a regular framework for comedy had been established which embraced the traditional chorus within a plot in which actors played the major part. As will be seen later, we can discern in Aristophanes' works the further gradual demise of the chorus which had been the sole original element. It is likely that humorous dramatic performances, involving a plot and actors, had existed on an unofficial basis long before comedy was first officially established at the City Dionysia but, so far as historical evidence is concerned, Attic comedy began in 486.

If the origins of comedy are obscure, there are however certain key figures in its development and I intend to touch briefly on three major writers, Epicharmos, Kratinos and Eupolis, before going on to discuss Aristophanes at some length.

It would appear that works of comic drama were performed in Sicily towards the close of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth centuries. The name which is associated with these productions is that of Epicharmos and it is he who is usually accepted as the first comic playwright. We know little of his work and even less of his life but it seems clear that he was born c. 530, lived and worked at Megara Hyblaea in Sicily in the late sixth century and moved to Syracuse possibly in 483 when Megara was destroyed by the tyrant Gelo. From the thirty-six pieces which are normally accepted as the work of Epicharmos we have only brief fragments but we might tentatively group his writings into two categories. The first is mythological burlesques which embrace stories about gods and heroes, particularly Dionysos, Odysseus and Herakles, making fun of their drunken and gluttonous adventures. The second category contains stories of everyday life and characters, exaggerating tendencies for comic purposes. What is perhaps the most quoted example of Epicharmos falls into this category, a monologue of a parasite from *Hope and Wealth* in which the parasite describes his lifestyle and his philosophy — a stock characterization which occurs again and again in comedy.

I have dinner with anyone who wishes it — all I need is an invitation.

As for anyone who doesn't wish it — well I don't need an invitation.

When I'm there I'm an agreeable chap and the cause of

a great deal of laughter. I praise my host

and, if anyone wants to contradict him,

I insult the fellow and take the brunt myself.

Then, when I've had plenty to eat and drink,
 off I go. I don't have a servant to accompany me with a light.
 I just creep along, stumbling about in the dark
 and all alone. When I meet the police on patrol
 I thank the gods for their kindness
 if they're satisfied with just giving me a good hiding.
 When I get home, a complete wreck,
 it's off to sleep without any bed-clothes and I don't notice at all
 as long as my brain's befuddled with unmixed wine.



Figure 1 Comedy scene with lover climbing up a ladder to a girl at a window — detail from a winebowl from southern Italy. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

It would appear that Epicharmos created an art form, albeit a relatively simple art form, from the scenes of crude buffoonery and mime which had previously existed, portraying the development and conclusion of a situation through the involvement of two or more characters.

Kratinos (c. 490–420) was an Athenian. Our knowledge of his work is confined to fragments but we do have an outline of the plot of one of his plays, *Dionysalexandros*. In this play Kratinos takes as a basis the well known story of Helen, Paris (Alexander) and Agamemnon's expedition. However, the well known legend is twisted and it is the god Dionysos with a group of attendant satyrs who, for most of the play, take over the part

of Paris. The three goddesses, as in the legend, make offers to him in their attempts to influence his choice of themselves as the most beautiful — the judgement of Paris, as it is sometimes called. Hera offers him power, Athene offers him success, but Aphrodite, instead of offering him the most beautiful woman on earth as in the legend, offers to make him irresistible to women. We may assume that this variation is inserted for comic purposes since, while the Paris of the legend was himself exceedingly handsome, Dionysos was probably portrayed in far less attractive vein and would be in need of the gift of irresistible charm. At the end of the play Helen passes into the hands of Paris, as in the legend, doubtless with great discomfort to Dionysos. The ancient writers and critics appear to have regarded Kratinos as the first great comic playwright, and it is he who appears to have introduced political satire into comedy. Indeed in *Dionysalexandros* Perikles, in the guise of one of the characters, Dionysos, is satirized as having brought war on the Athenians.

Eupolis was born in Athens, probably in 445. It is probable that he was killed in the war and certain that he was dead by the close of the war in 404. Eupolis was at first a friend of Aristophanes, and indeed collaborated with him in the composition of *Knights* (424), but later quarrelled with him. He is famed for the magnificent imagination of his plots but once more our knowledge of him is confined to fragments and we are left today with only hints of his excellence. We do have, however, considerable fragments of *Demes* in which it appears that Nikias summons certain famous Athenians of the past to help the Athenian state in its hour of need. (The play was produced sometime between 418 and 415.) Miltiades, Aristides, Solon and Perikles¹ appear to have been the four so summoned but we know little of the unfolding plot. However, it is clear that the play was one of political satire in which politicians past and present became the butt of the dramatist's wit.

¹Miltiades was the victorious Athenian general in the battle against the Persians at Marathon (490). Aristides was also at Marathon and held supreme command over the Athenian army at Plataea (479). Thereafter he was chiefly responsible for winning over adherents to the Delian league. Solon was popularly regarded as the founder of Athenian democracy. He was responsible for a series of laws (594–593) which were designed to alleviate a political crisis, concerning questions of status and the economic problems attendant upon this, which existed at the beginning of the sixth century. Perikles will be known to you from your study of the Peloponnesian War.

3 ARISTOPHANES

Aristophanes was born *c.* 445 and is the first comic writer from whom we have extant entire plays. Although he was often accused of foreign birth by his rivals, he was born of Athenian parents and belonged to the deme of Kydathenaion and the tribe of Pandionis. His first play, *Banqueters*, was produced in 427 when he was only eighteen and won the second prize. It was followed by some forty others of which eleven are extant and are listed below with details of their production where this is known. (See Section 4 p. 13 for an explanation of the festivals.)

- 425 *Acharnians*, performed at the Lenaia under the name of Kallistratos¹, won the first prize defeating amongst others Kratinos and Eupolis.
- 424 *Knights*, performed at the Lenaia under his own name, won the first prize.
- 423 *Clouds*, performed at the Great Dionysia, won the third prize, being beaten by Kratinos and another dramatist. It is said that Aristophanes was bitterly disappointed with third prize and produced a second edition. The play which we possess is not entirely the same as that performed in 423. How far it is changed is a matter of much scholarly debate.
- 422 *Wasps*, performed at the Lenaia, won the second prize. There is some confusion as to the name under which this play was performed and the name of the dramatist who won first prize.
- 421 *Peace*, performed at the Great Dionysia, won the second prize being defeated by a play of Eupolis.
- 414 *Birds*, performed at the Great Dionysia under the name of Kallistratos, won the second prize.
- 411 *Lysistrata*, performed at the Lenaia under the name of Kallistratos. Nothing is known of its success.
- 411 *Thesmophoriazusai* ('Women Celebrating the Thesmophoria', a women's festival regularly performed in the autumn), performed at the Great Dionysia. Nothing is known of its success.
- 405 *Frogs*, performed at the Lenaia under the name of Philonides, won the first prize.
- c.393 *Ekklesiazusai* ('Women in Assembly'). It is not known at what festival or with what success this play was performed.
- 388 *Wealth*. It is not known at what festival or with what success this play was performed.

So far as we are able to judge from the comments made about Aristophanes by his contemporaries and by later writers who still had a full corpus on which to base their judgement, Aristophanes is the supreme comic dramatist. The Alexandrian critics ranked him with Kratinos and Eupolis. Several of his works were produced under other names as we have seen from the lists of his extant plays. The date of his death is uncertain but is likely to have occurred *c.* 385. Of the non-extant works we know some titles and have some fragments, but of his life we know little other than the bare outline I have given.

Our judgement of Aristophanes has to be made on the basis of only about one quarter of his literary output. Our attempts at a comparison between him and his contemporaries — our estimation of his position as a comic dramatist — has to be made in the realization that of the fifty or so comic dramatists with whom his career overlapped, we have not one single play. The fact that some of Aristophanes' work has survived the centuries might be seen as merely fortuitous but when we consider his fame in the ancient world, we might be led to the view that his work has survived because of interest and

¹For the use of specialist producers see Section 4 p. 16.



Figure 2 Grave relief from Athens c. 380. Since the man is holding a comic mask he is assumed to be a comic poet, perhaps Aristophanes. (Lyme Hall, Stockport. Photograph by Penelope Davies. Reproduced by permission of Lord Newton and the National Trust.)

popularity. There is the story that the tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysos, asked the philosopher Plato to describe the constitution of Athens. Plato responded by sending him the works of Aristophanes. We know too that Aristophanes' work became an object of scholarly study within one hundred years of his death. From the third century we have almost a complete continuum of study and interpretation of Aristophanes up to the present day, broken only by the Dark Ages of the seventh centuries AD when the Western Roman Empire had collapsed and when the predominantly Christian and Greek-speaking Eastern Empire, with its capital at Constantinople, had turned its face from pagan Greek poetry.

It is not possible, of course, to say that the eleven plays which we have today are word-for-word copies of the manuscript as Aristophanes wrote it. For almost two thousand years the text was perpetuated only through manual copying, and the ability of the copyists and their degree of fidelity is varied. The Byzantine scholars in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD often appear to be scrupulous in their attention to detail whereas we know from a comparison of extant manuscripts that many ancient copyists were often reckless and hasty. There are, however, no all-embracing rules which can be applied, since Byzantine scholars, in their attempts to make sense of wholesale corruptions, might

have destroyed any hope we might have today of recreating the original. Nonetheless, it must not be thought that the plays as you read them today are far removed from the originals. Corruption by copyists is normally limited to odd words or, at the most, phrases. In addition, as far as the eleven plays of Aristophanes are concerned, we have the complete text extant and are not beset with the sort of problems which arise when, for example, the first or last page of the only manuscript of a play is missing. Modern scholarship, by comparing manuscripts from as early as 1000 AD, has been able to recreate a text which we might confidently assume to be very close to the original.

You will see from my definition of Greek Comedy (p.6) and the list of Aristophanes' plays (p.10) that *Ekklesiazusai* is one of two plays of Aristophanes which fall into the period of middle comedy. All the rest are old comedy and I have already made some broad generalizations concerning the differences between old and middle comedy (p.6). In this unit we are concerned almost exclusively with *Ekklesiazusai* but if you want to get a feel for Aristophanes you should try to read at least one of the early plays — there are numerous cheap translations available.

When we compare *Ekklesiazusai* with the earlier plays we can see a major change, apart from the purely structural differences in the use of the chorus and parabasis (the chorus' address to the audience) to which I will return later. *Ekklesiazusai* is considerably more rational than the old comedy plays. Perhaps you do not think that the notion of women taking over the assembly and overthrowing the accustomed order bears much resemblance to reality and particularly the reality of Athenian civilization. However, I think you will agree that it is nowhere near as fantastic as the notion of leaving the clamour and litigation of Athens and founding a city in the air, a sort of fairyland from which gods and men alike can be controlled (the scheme in *Birds*) or going down into the underworld to bring back Euripides because there is such a lack of good tragedians since his death (the scheme in *Frogs*). In *Ekklesiazusai* situations are more logical and explanations are given. Praxagora gives a sound reason for her ability to speak well (ll.243 ff). In old comedy no such explanation would be expected; there the irrational, the fantastic and the unusual are juxtaposed and interwoven. Often no plausible explanation of a particular activity could be given, but this hardly matters as the comic action moves rapidly on from one impossible situation to another.

As a concomitant to the move towards a more rational plot in the last two plays of Aristophanes we find the beginnings of the development of characterization. Perhaps we might not expect an Athenian woman to do as Praxagora does in *Ekklesiazusai* but we do begin to see in her the delineation of a character. We see something of her personality to such an extent that our sympathy and empathy are engaged. Nowhere in the earlier plays do we find this sort of characterization.

4 THE DRAMATIC FESTIVALS

You should bear in mind when reading this section what you have read about Greek Tragedy in Units 3 and 4, and the religious and social background of Athens in Units 7 and 8.

At the time when Aristophanes was writing there were no regular theatrical presentations throughout the year such as we are used to today. Plays were performed at two great festivals both of which were held in honour of the god Dionysos. One of these festivals, the Lenaia, took place in January and was a purely domestic festival (at this time of year the seas were too dangerous and there was little or no commerce and travel). Official recognition and responsibility for the supervision of comedy at this festival did not begin until 442 and it was probably a further ten years before tragedy was added. The other festival, the City Dionysia or Great Dionysia, seems to have been of greater importance, not simply because it embraced performances of both dramatic and lyric poetry, but also because it occurred towards the end of March when the winter storms had abated and people travelled to Athens from all parts of the Greek world and beyond for business or pleasure. Thus the Great Dionysia was an advertisement to the whole world of the artistic and literary leadership of the Athenian dramatists and the wealth and power of the Athenian state. After the founding of the Athenian League the allies were accustomed to bring their tribute to Athens at this time of the year and Isokrates tells us that this tribute was displayed in the Theatre of Dionysos. It was at the City Dionysia that the state first assumed responsibility for the production of comedy in 486 although tragedies had been presented from 534.

The Great Dionysia and the Lenaia were religious festivals. It is difficult for us today to realize the religious significance in its true context since we are tempted, for the most part, to take the drama itself out of its original context and to view it as an art form. Of course, the Athenians too viewed the drama as art but for them the element of formal pious observance was paramount. The Athenian theatre-goer did not go out to watch a play when he felt like it. Indeed, the idea of theatre-going would have been alien to the Athenian. It was rather that the Athenian worshipper watched plays on a couple of occasions during the year because these happened to be part of the religious festivals at these times. There were other festivals in honour of the same god at which there were no dramatic performances, as you will be aware (see Units 7 and 8), but only two included the production of plays and, even in these, the dramatic element was only one part. The City Dionysia, for example, probably lasted for five or six days but only the last three were devoted to tragedy and comedy.

We might get some idea of the sanctity of the occasion by noting that any personal insult against any of the people involved in the ceremony, whether poet, actors or even spectators, was punishable by very severe penalties, since it was an offence not only against the individual but against the god under whose auspices the individual was taking part in the ceremony. A special assembly of the people was held on the day following the Great Dionysia to deal with such cases and presumably the same was true for the Lenaia. Any violation of sanctity was considered at this assembly, including allegations of unfair decisions or mismanagement on the part of officials. The speech of Demosthenes, *Against Meidias*, provides us with a notable example of such sacrilege. Demosthenes was choregos (see p. 16) at the Great Dionysia of 351–50. On the day of the performance, as he was seated awaiting the competition for lyric choruses, Meidias approached him and hit him. There had been a previous history to this quarrel. Demosthenes raised the matter as sacrilege at the special meeting of the assembly and, since the verdict went in his favour, he was permitted to bring the case before the court. In fact, Demosthenes never brought an action and the speech which we have was never delivered. However, it does give some insight into the seriousness of sacrilege.

I do not imagine that you will give him [Meidias] a lighter punishment than will be sufficient to make him cease from his insolence. Most suitably this would be the death penalty but, failing that, the complete confiscation of his property. (*Against Meidias* 152.)

There was another man whom you considered to have committed sacrilege in connection with the Dionysia and you condemned him, although he was acting as an assessor to his son, the Archon, because he laid hands on someone who had taken a seat while ejecting him from the theatre . . . Furthermore the whole people condemned another man for committing sacrilege in connection with the festival and, when he came before you, you condemned him to death — his name was Ktesikles — because he carried a whip in the processions and, while drunk, struck with this a man who happened to be his enemy. (*Against Meidias* 178–80.)

Our modern concepts of divine worship make it difficult for us to appreciate these religious festivals. People who worship today attend a church and we are aware that in the Middle Ages miracle plays were originally performed in Christian churches. The Greek temple was in no way equivalent to a Christian church. It was considered to be the earthly abode of a god and was not a large meeting place for the faithful. Greek drama was not therefore linked to the temple. Moreover, worship was not a private matter and the sanctity of the occasion did not demand reserve on the part of individuals. The religious festivals were attended by all. Indeed attendance at the dramatic festivals was considered so important that towards the end of the fifth century anyone who could not pay the small admission fee could apply for a grant from the state for this purpose. It is probable that even women and girls attended, freed temporarily from the normal seclusion of Greek households. The worshippers, or audience as we call them, attended the production of the plays which, as we have seen (p. 6), were liberally sprinkled with indecencies and the broadest of jokes. After the plays had been completed, the worshippers closed the day's proceedings in revelry heightened by a liberal supply of drink.

The presentation of plays at the festival was competitive and, as I have mentioned above, had come to be organized by the state. During the period we are studying there were normally five comic poets competing at each of the two festivals although this was reduced to three for the duration of the Peloponnesian War (431–404), probably because the cost of putting on so many plays could not be borne in the financial depression at this time.

If it is difficult for us to appreciate the religious context of the plays, it is even more difficult for us to comprehend the idea of a series of festival days twice a year at which up to five plays were presented on each day. When we go to the theatre today we invariably go in the evening and we expect to see a play lasting up to three hours, if we include the interval. The Greeks went to the theatre in the morning and stayed all day, or at least until the early afternoon. They also often attended on consecutive days. In this time they might see at the City Dionysia in a single day three tragedies, one satyr play and one comedy. There would be short intervals between each of the plays but, judging from the length of the plays and such evidence as can be derived from modern presentations of them, the dramatic activities would take some six or seven hours to complete and the audience would be free by mid-afternoon to engage in other forms of entertainment — perhaps the feasting and drinking which is regularly hinted at in the ending of comedies.

Since there were limitations on the number of plays which could be presented in a given year, the poets who had plays to offer had to submit to a process of formal selection by the relevant Archons who were appointed annually by lot and had an official responsibility for the supervision of these activities. The appointment of officials by lot would certainly help to prevent corruption and unfair judgements. However, officials appointed by lot would be unlikely to have a special ability for picking the best plays and indeed this was only one of a wide range of their duties. Consequently, unless they consulted experts amongst their acquaintances — and we have no evidence to suggest that

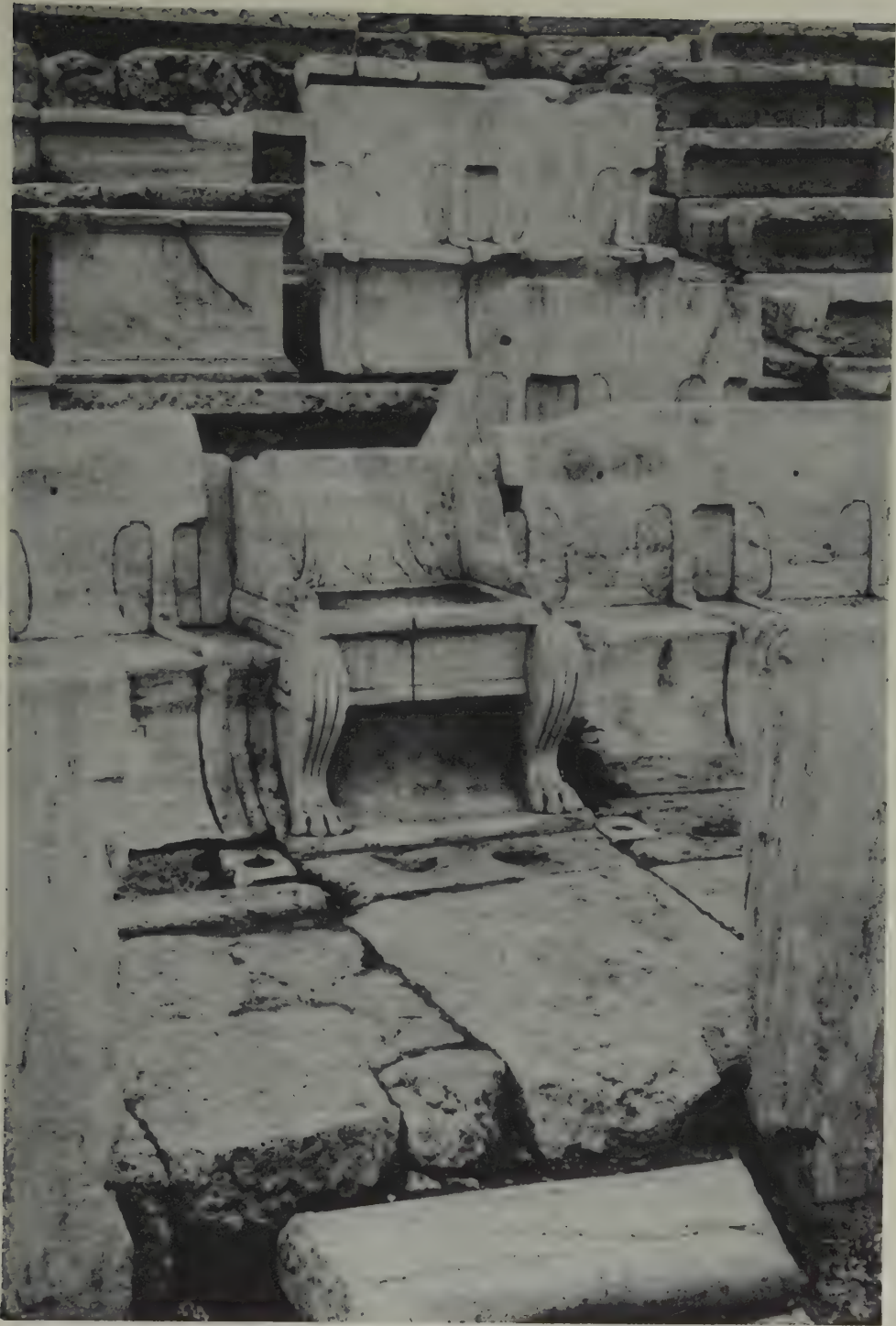


Figure 3 Marble seats for priests and officials at the festivals, Theatre of Dionysos, Athens. (Photo: Ronald Sheridan.)

they did — they would be likely to play safe by choosing those dramatists who had already established their reputations.

The dramatists did not submit their completed plays to the Archon but we might assume that they offered a fairly detailed account of what they had in mind and perhaps also read specimens of their work. On this scanty evidence the Archon made his choice of the comedies which would be presented at the forthcoming festival. Normally a dramatist would offer only a single play but occasionally two plays by the same author were selected for production at the same festival. When a dramatist had a play selected, actors were allocated for the performance and they were paid by the state. In addition a choregos was assigned to the play and it was his responsibility to hire, train and fit out,

at his own personal expense, the members of the chorus. The tragic dramatists normally produced their own plays but in comedy separate producers were not infrequent. We know that Aristophanes' first play *Banqueters* (427) had such a separate producer (Kallistratos), as had five of his extant plays. We do not know the reason why separate producers existed. It may well be true that composition and production would require different talents, or alternatively that the dramatist might not want the labour of teaching his performers and rehearsing his play with all the attendant business which is implied. However, this would be true of tragic and comic dramatists alike. It might well be that in comedy, where the plot was unfamiliar to the audience, the rôle of the producer was much more important and comic dramatists preferred to hand this over to experienced producers of comedy in order to obtain the best possible presentation. We might assume that author and producer would be working closely together, adding to or subtracting from the original version and introducing topical allusions up to the last minute in order to take account of the relevant political situation or the latest social conventions.

Although the producer had responsibility for the actors and their rehearsal, the cost of hiring, training and fitting out the chorus of twenty-four was, as I have mentioned, the responsibility of a choregos, initially presumably, as the name implies, a chorus leader. However, by the time of Aristophanes the choregos was more like a manager and he would hire, also at his own expense, someone to train the chorus and a piper to accompany their songs. The expense attendant on this office was very heavy and was borne by the richest citizens in turn. You will recall from Units 7 and 8 that revenue in Athens was collected in part by indirect taxation and in part by allocating the responsibility for festivals, ceremonies, warships, etc. to certain rich individuals. In the financial difficulties of the later war years it was difficult to find men who could afford this duty and indeed, in 406–405, the duties of each choregos, both in tragedy and comedy, were divided between two men. In general, the larger size of the comic chorus and the temptation to extravagance afforded by the play made comic choruses more expensive than those of tragedy.

As we have already seen, the dramatist faced competition in trying to get his play on at one of the festivals. When he had received a place, his play would then be judged at its performance. The appointment of the judge was itself an elaborate performance. Before the festival the council compiled a list of names from each of the ten tribes and these were placed in ten urns, one for each tribe. Just before the contest, the Archon drew one name from each urn and the ten people thus selected swore an oath to give an unbiased verdict. At the end of the contest they recorded their preferences on tablets which were placed in an urn and the Archon drew out five of these at random to decide the contest. This elaborate ritual, designed to create impartiality, was not by any means foolproof. Threats and bribes could enter into the process at several stages and the clamour of partisans in the theatre was also likely to play its part in influencing the judgement of the ten judges. Like most of the other officials in Athens the judges could, in this case, be called to account at the special assembly held after the festival (see p. 13 above).

Every dramatist who had one of his plays performed at a festival received a payment from the state but we do not know how much it was or whether it was paid when the play was originally selected, when the play had been performed or in some other way. When the judges had arrived at their decision the winning dramatist was presented with a garland of ivy, as was the choregos and the actors of the successful play. Whether there was any other reward is not known but we might assume that there was some additional financial award for the victorious comic dramatist since we know that prizes were offered for other literary activities, although our evidence for this is of a somewhat later date. If there was a financial reward it is unlikely that it would have been very great. However, success was likely to breed success since, as we have seen (pp. 14 ff.), when the dramatists were being selected by the Archons in subsequent years a victorious reputation was likely to be of great value.

Our evidence for the activity at the festivals is derived to no small extent from the plays themselves. What can we learn about this activity from *Ekklesiazusai*?



Discussion

The evidence both direct and circumstantial, is concentrated in the final scene of the play.

1141–3 Although it is the judges who are going to decide upon the prize, the favour of the audience is clearly very important. The elaborate process of appointing the judges might well have eliminated the possibility of bribery but it could not eliminate intimidation. The judges knew that they had to make a popular decision — if they did not they could be called to account in a matter of hours. Perhaps Aristophanes' reference to the 'judges who are not backing someone else' is to be regarded as a warning to them to pay attention to popular opinion and not vote for the dramatist who happens to be their friend or fellow demesman — or else!

1146 We might assume from this passage that young boys were present as well as adults. A similar address is made in *Peace* ll. 50 ff. and in Menander's *Dyskolos* ll. 967. This does not prove, however, that women were not present, only that it was probably not quite the done thing to appeal to women, or not considered worth doing since they were of minimal importance. In Plato's *Laws* (658A–D and 817C) there is an assumption that women were present at the dramatic festivals at that time, namely the middle of the fourth century, and we have no reason to believe that they were not present at tragedies and comedies of the fifth century.

1155 The intellectual range of the judges was considerable since they were chosen by lot and not because of any literary ability or knowledge of drama.

1158 The order of the plays was fixed by ballot and the final slot of the day was considered to be the best since, always assuming that the play was good, it would be fresh in the minds of the audience and judges.

1160 The judges were under oath to give a fair and unbiased verdict. The sanctity of the dramatic festivals probably made the oath more important than normal. Here again perhaps we can see a veiled hint on the part of Aristophanes, 'don't break your oath or you will soon have to answer for it!'

1112–end. Dionysos was the god of wine and laughter. The tipsy state of the servant girl and the general hilarity and revelry in which all join, even Blepyros (l. 1165), at the end of the play provide us with some background to the way in which these religious festivals were celebrated, a way which is almost alien to modern western civilization which is so firmly rooted in a Christian tradition.

5 THE PRODUCTION OF COMEDY

The conditions for the production of tragedy have been mentioned in Units 3 and 4 (§ 2), which you should re-read at this point. I will be noting here some of the points in which comedy differs from tragedy and looking in particular at the production of *Ekklesiazusai*. There are some exercises in this section which demand a careful re-reading of the play. I suggest therefore that you read through this section quickly, noting in particular the exercises, and then read the play and notes through again, making your own notes to answer the exercises and trying to keep in the back of your mind what I have said about the dramatic festivals. You will then be in a position to go through this section more slowly, relating your reading of *Ekklesiazusai* to the particular developments which I highlight.

We might begin by pointing to one particular development in the relationship of poet and audience in Aristophanes, namely the address to the audience. Such an address might be purely an aside where one character addresses a few words to the audience which are not heard by the other character on stage or might involve all the characters on stage and the audience.

DEMOSTHENES I find that very convincing. But we must find some other way.

Do you want me to tell the story to the audience?

NIKIAS Not a bad idea. But let's ask them first

to make it plain to us by their looks

whether they are pleased by our words and acts:

DEMOSTHENES I'll tell them now . . .

(*Knights* ll. 35 ff.)

It may well be that the direct address to the audience was influenced by the prologue speeches which we find in Euripides but its origins must surely lie in the early development of comedy. A result of this particular development is that the comic dramatist has a closer relationship with his audience than does the tragic dramatist. In the tragic theatre we are in, as it were, two separate worlds, that of the *dramatis personae* on the stage and that of the audience. The audience might be involved in the play to such an extent that they abandon, at least momentarily, their own reality and identify themselves completely with the characters on the stage. Alternatively they might choose to remain in their own world, merely observing at a distance the world of the stage. By an address to the audience the comic dramatist temporarily shelves the dramatic illusion. The characters in the play and the audience become part of the same world, the real world so far as the audience is concerned. The audience, that is the population of Athens, thus becomes intimately involved in this particular art form and thus in the literature of Athens. A great deal of the life and strength of drama in the theatre arose from this intimate involvement and it is important to keep this in mind when reading the plays.

What examples have you noted of an address to the audience in *Ekklesiazusai*?



Discussion

Here are some examples which I think are important — you might well choose others and, if you happen to know other students taking this course, this question might usefully form the basis for self-help group discussions.

In my note on line 888 I have said that there was probably an appeal for audience participation at this point. This occurs at a particularly lively interchange in a 'debate' between two contrasting viewpoints. The audience might be expected to take sides — or rather the side of the Young Girl — and it may well be that the Old Woman and Young Girl encouraged, by exaggerated gesture and movement about the stage, a partisan attitude in the audience; the Young Woman actively seeking support and the Old Woman scorning the support that her opponent received. At 1105 ff. the Young Man involves the audience by referring to them but it seems unlikely that Aristophanes is seeking audience participation in quite the same way as in the previous example. At 1141 ff. there is a further direct appeal which is a straight request for support for the playwright. From this point until the end of the play the drama and reality are completely intertwined. It is easy for us to pick out specific lines and assign them to the drama or to the real world. In a production such a distinction would be impossible. I believe that we have in the ending of *Ekklesiazusai* the most extreme example in extant Greek drama of association between dramatist and audience. It might be said that a principal objective in the final scenes of knock-about comedy (ll. 877 ff.) is the association of the audience with the drama. There is certainly more opportunity here for audience participation than in any other Greek drama. You might also have noted the sort of comment made at lines 129 and 167 (see my note on 129). Here there is no demand for audience participation. This sort of comment does, however, link the dramatic illusion to



Figure 4 Comic actor dressed as a woman. Terracotta statuette. Attica fifth century. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

everyday life in Athens and Aristophanes is finding a common ground between himself and his audience on which he can build. When Praxagora tells the audience not to interrupt (l. 588) it is possible that Aristophanes is trying to get a particular message over to the people of Athens. Her address to the members of the assembly in the drama is made to the audience who constitute the assembly in reality.

Whereas in Greek tragedy three actors appear to have been the normal requirement with possible use of a fourth non-speaking actor, this restriction does not seem to have existed for comedy where there are quite a large number of passages that are four-cornered dialogue. In addition, there are many instances where the departure and arrival of different characters is so close that a change of costume, or even just a change of mask, would have been impossible. There are, however, no passages in which more than four speaking characters are required. How the parts were divided between the four actors is not known. It may be that most of the parts were taken by three major actors and the fourth was employed only to cope with particular situations. This would be, as it were, an intermediate stage between the use of three and the need for four actors. However, it is worth pointing out that in one of Aristophanes' plays, *Clouds*, the fourth actor part must be quite substantial and could hardly be termed a minor 'extra'.

Can you find any occasions in *Ekklesiazusai* when four actors are required? (Remember the chorus leader and chorus are not counted as actors, so the opening scene in which the chorus assemble with Praxagora is not to be included.)



Discussion

There is no example of four-cornered dialogue in *Ekklesiazusai*, but there are two occasions when the departure and arrival of different characters is so close that a fourth actor is almost certainly needed.

The first is at line 1049. The Young Man, the Young Girl and Old Woman I are all on stage at line 1037. Old Woman I leaves the stage at line 1044 and Old Woman II enters at line 1049. It has been suggested that the actor playing Old Woman I merely changed his mask and appeared as Old Woman II. This is possible but I think unlikely. Old Woman II is described as a much more fearsome creature than Old Woman I and we might assume that the physical difference did not just exist in the mask.

The second occasion is at line 1112. The Young Man and the two Old Women depart into the house at line 1111 leaving the stage blank. Immediately the Servant Girl appears.

As in tragedy it was men who played both male and female parts but there are occasional speaking parts for children who no doubt were extras. It is reasonable to assume, however, that there were some women on the stage on some occasions since there are many instances where reference is made to beautiful young women. The ending of *Ekklesiazusai* is a notable example of this where the girls seem to be introduced merely to add to the general festivity (see my note on line 1128). We might assume that slave girls were available to the managers for use in such episodes and there are several instances where male slaves probably played the part of silent extras.

Both tragic and comic actors wore masks but their elaborate costumes were different. Our evidence for costume comes, for the most part, from vases and terracottas, and it

appears that the comic actor was grotesquely padded and wore a leather phallus of abnormal size. The phallus is the symbol of Dionysos and its presence goes back to the origins of comedy, as we have seen. Since it was worn over a pair of close fitting tights it was obvious to the audience and could be used for comic purposes both in action and in verbal references. (You will have seen that there is a reference to this in *Ekklesiazusai* — see my note on line 969. There is considerable comic potential when one is introduced by the First Old Woman, line 890. It seems quite likely that this would be used as a convenient handle in the attempts to drag the Young Man into the house.) It had however, one further useful purpose as far as the audience was concerned in that it was a clear indication of the sex of the character. The actors who played the part of women wore tights also but without the phallus and probably padded their breasts. When women dressed as men, as in *Ekklesiazusai*, they did not wear the phallus as this would have distinguished them as real men and not women dressed as men. It would appear that comic actors also wore padding on their stomachs. The exaggerated paunch was presumably taken from the earlier impersonation of Dionysiac demons and this too was normal for male and female parts and could be used for comic purposes. We can discern in our vases and terracottas a movement away from this somewhat indecent attire in the fourth century. This is paralleled, as we have already seen, in the move away from obscenity in the plays themselves, and, by the time of Menander and New Comedy, decency of dress and language has become the norm.

As far as the rest of the dress was concerned both male and female parts had a garment resembling a shift dress, covering the body and leaving the arms free. This was called a *chiton* and was the normal Greek male dress around the house. In comedy the man's *chiton* is normally shorter than that of the woman. (You will have seen some comic reference to this in the scene between Blepyros and the man, lines 311 ff.) The outer garment for both sexes was a *himation*, a cloak in the form of a rectangular piece of cloth hanging round the body with the end draped over the right shoulder. Variations in the type of cloak were quite common, particularly for male characters, and ranged from small coarse cloaks for philosophers to large and luxurious cloaks for the well-to-do. On their feet the actors of comedy wore a variety of sandals and this differentiated them from the tragic actors who normally wore boots. As far as headgear is concerned we have little reference in the plays themselves although our evidence from terracottas would seem to suggest quite a variety here from conical to wide-brimmed hats.

Actors in comedy just as in tragedy wore masks. None of these masks has survived, which is hardly surprising since linen and occasionally cork or wood were employed in their construction. The specific types of masks employed for particular characters or character types is a topic of much scholarly debate which need not detain us here. What is important is to note the restriction which masks imposed and also the use to which they could be put. Masks of course could be used to enable a small number of actors to carry out a large number of parts and to change from one part to the next with considerable speed. The mouthpiece of the mask was large and it has been suggested, although I myself have some doubts on this point, that this might have magnified the sound of the actor's voice and thus helped in the presentation of drama in the open air and in a large theatre. Masks could be used of course to exaggerate expressions and make them visible to the audience, but it would be wrong to make too much of this particular aspect since it is unlikely that the audience towards the back of the theatre would be able to see even the exaggerated detail of the mask.

In the modern theatre, in films and on television we have grown accustomed to regard facial expression as an essential part of acting. It is reasonable to assume that the Greek actor, prevented from such facial movement, expressed emotion with his body and arms to a much greater extent than is customary today. In addition, the poet often inserts descriptions of emotions such as 'I am laughing', 'I am crying', etc. Such comments would of course be unnecessary on the modern stage but were essential in the Greek theatre when the expression of a particular emotion became important.

It is often suggested that there is one further point of difference between tragedy and comedy, and that is in relation to the number of doors in the *skene* (backdrop). It has

been assumed that tragedy required only a single door for its performance while comedy required up to three. One of the difficulties inherent in such a divergence of practice is that the same theatre building was used for tragedy and comedy. Since the tragic contests began in the second half of the sixth century and comedy was only introduced in 486, we would have to assume that the comic poets, accustomed to a theatre which only had one door, nevertheless decided to write plays in which there was a need for more doors. Moreover it might appear somewhat strange that when comedy had demanded an increase in the number of doors available no tragic writer seems to have made use of this added dimension to the theatre. On the other hand it is pointed out that in several plays of Aristophanes different houses are referred to. One such play is *Ekklesiazusai*. The single door on the stage represents the house of a large number of people as you will have seen from the stage directions which I have inserted in the translation: Praxagora's neighbour (l. 33), Praxagora's husband (l. 311), the Man (l. 327), Chremes (l. 729), the Young Girl and the three Old Women in the final scenes. No-one has suggested that the stage had more than three doors and yet there are more than three households in *Ekklesiazusai*. If we accept that some of the households shared a door, why can we not accept that all shared one door? Our notions of the modern stage, with its elaborate scenery and need to appear true to life, were not shared by the Greeks for whom much more was left to the imagination. Having considered the evidence in the plays of Aristophanes I believe that it is entirely possible, and even probable, that the plays were performed with only one door. For the purposes of the play it may well be that the audience has to imagine that at different times this door represents different people's houses. The door merely represents an alternative exit to that provided by the wings, namely an exit inside.

If such a situation appears to our modern experience somewhat unsatisfactory and unreal we must consider it in relation to the Greek theatre in general where there could be little attempt at reality. There was, for the most part, no way of creating an illusion of darkness when plays were performed in the open air and in broad daylight. You will note that there are several references in the first few hundred lines of *Ekklesiazusai* to the fact that it is not yet dawn. These references set the scene and provide a continual reminder to the audience, maintaining the illusion by reference rather than by any dramatic effects. A similar problem occurred of course in the presentation of interior scenes. *Ekklesiazusai* does not contain such scenes but they are relatively common in tragedy and comedy in general. The Greek dramatists had no means of creating a scene inside a house on the stage and the audience, which had never been accustomed to reality in dramatic presentation, had no problems in appreciating the play and making the necessary imaginative leaps, provided that the dramatist pointed these out in the course of the play. Further examples of a requirement in the imagination of the ancient audience which would jar on the sensibilities of the modern theatregoer are common. In Aristophanes' last play, *Wealth*, the blind god leaves the stage to spend the night in the temple of Asklepios. He departs at line 626, and in the next line there begins a scene in which we hear how the god has recovered his sight and of the events that took place that night. Moreover, the chorus remains on the stage throughout this leap in time. Such a break in the time sequence clearly presented no problems to the imagination of the Greek audience.

Probably one of the most difficult problems facing the modern dramatist is that of entrances and exits. We expect that each character will have a motive for his departure and for his arrival. Moreover we expect that if he re-appears he will do so whence he originally departed or, if not, will provide a good reason for not doing so. If he departs into a house, we expect that he will see the other people whom we know to be already in that house or, if he does not do so, he will provide us with an explanation. These problems were even more acute for the Greek dramatists. You have already seen (Units 3 and 4 p. 16) how the entrances from the wings were limited by convention. They represented roads to the town (the one to the right as we look at the stage) and to the country (the one to the left as we look at the stage). Thus the modern audience might expect one character departing, let us say, to the town to see another character entering from the town. For the Greek there was no such dramatic reality. One of the best

examples of this occurs in Euripides' *Alkestis*. Herakles rushes off at line 860 to fight with the King of the Dead over the body of Alkestis which her husband, Admetos, and the chorus have previously carried out. In the very next line Admetos returns. Thus Herakles departs by, and Admetos arrives from, the same wing in consecutive lines. Yet it is clear from later developments that they did not meet. When we consider the physical arrangements of the Greek stage, which was quite long, we can see even greater problems in the time which it would take Herakles to walk or even run off and for Admetos to walk on. Clearly the Greeks were not troubled by this lack of realism and it may be that the two passed each other on stage.

I hope that by the examples I have mentioned above I have given you some idea of the difference in expectation of realism between the ancient and modern audience. When you read *Ekklesiazusai*, or for that matter any Greek comedy or tragedy, you should not expect perfect motivation for entrances and exits. As far as the Greek audience was concerned, when the characters departing stopped speaking and before the characters arriving started speaking they did not exist, unless specially required to do so. Thus it did not matter which entrance they arrived from or departed by, except that if they went inside they would go through the door. It needed no extra leap in the imagination of the Greek audience to allow a single door to represent any number of houses. The convention of three doors on a stage is proven only for new comedy and, as far as Aristophanes is concerned, we have no reason to demand more than one door for entry to and departure from the inside.

Before moving on from the problems of dramatic production, it is worthwhile noting the difference between the tragic and comic chorus and the various developments. As we have already seen, the comic chorus numbered twenty-four. It is likely that this was the number at the time of the official recognition of comedy in 486 and there is no evidence of any changes in the number for old and middle comedy. However, we know that the chorus at the Soteric Festival at Delphi after 272 numbered some seven or eight and it may be that by the time of new comedy the chorus, now divorced completely from the play, had been significantly reduced.

The chorus often represented human beings but it could quite frequently take on a fantastic guise to serve the dramatic needs of the playwright. Thus we have choruses of wasps, birds, frogs, goats and a variety of other animals and insects in addition to knights, graces, poets, etc. The chorus members could represent males or females. Thus in *Clouds* the cloud chorus is thought of as women and in *Frogs* the frog chorus is both men and women. However, the members of the chorus, just as the actors in the play, were male. Consequently, in *Ekklesiazusai*, we actually have male chorus members representing a chorus of women and these women themselves, as part of the dramatic action, put on the disguise of men!



Figure 5 Chorus of feathered men from British Museum vase B.509. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

By the time of Menander and new comedy, the part of the chorus had disappeared from the main action and from the texts of the plays. In Menander all we find is the Greek word ΧΟΡΟΥ (pronounced 'chorou'), literally the part of the chorus, and this choral interlude, so it seems, divides the plays of new comedy into acts. As far as we can see, the chorus of new comedy had no relevance to the dramatic action. Occasionally one of the characters in the play refers to its impending arrival.

Let's go. There's a crowd of tipsy young
fellows coming here. I don't think it's a
good time to get involved with them.

(*Epitrepontes* 33–5)

Probably there was at this point a performance by a group of revellers. Certainly it had nothing to do with the action at this point in the play. Often, however, in Menander there was not even a mention of the presence of the chorus, merely a break in the dramatic action when all the characters are off-stage.

The chorus had been the original dominant element in earliest comedy as we have seen (p. 7), and in the earliest plays of Aristophanes it has a significant part to play. It is customary to define within comedy three basic elements, *parodos*, *agon* and *parabasis*. The *parodos* is the entrance of the chorus and comes after the initial prologue, which in itself is not a basic dramatic element — it merely serves to set the scene. In origin the *parodos* was entirely choral but by the time of Aristophanes it had been developed to include passages in which the ordinary actors took a part. Normally such passages come after the part of the chorus and, when we use the term *parodos* with reference to Greek comedy, we use it with this wider definition. The *agon* is the formal debate between two actors in which one side is victorious, and it is followed by the *parabasis* which originally marks the completion of the action of the play and is an address to the audience by the chorus.

This brief description of the triadic form of comedy is a very incomplete outline of what is a highly complex subject. After the *parabasis* there followed a series of scenes separated by brief choral interludes, portraying the results of the decisions reached in the *agon* and linked only loosely to the plot without advancing the action any further.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the chorus in the early plays of Aristophanes comes in the *parabasis*. After the *agon* the action normally requires that all the characters should, for varying reasons, be off-stage at one point; then the chorus makes its direct and often very lengthy address to the audience, the *parabasis*. While the *parabasis* took place the dramatic illusion was suspended. In the *parabasis* of the first five plays of Aristophanes the chorus at one point set aside their identity in the play as a chorus of knights, clouds, wasps, etc., and instead speak about matters which have little or nothing to do with the plot but a great deal to do with the politics and politicians of the day. This activity is of course totally unreal in dramatic terms and has no connection with the preceding events of the play. In *Birds* (414) for the first time the chorus maintains its character throughout the *parabasis* and the same might be said of *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusai*, but in *Frogs* there is a reversal more or less to the earlier form of *parabasis*. The last two plays of Aristophanes, *Ekklesiazusai* and *Wealth*, have no *parabasis* whatsoever and the traditional triadic form is unrecognizable in them.

Aristotle gives us some idea of the part played by the chorus, or rather the part which it ought to play.

The chorus should be regarded as one of the actors. It should be a part of the whole and should join in the action not as in Euripides but as in Sophokles. For later poets the choral parts no more belong to the plot of the play than they do some other tragedy. Thus they are sung as interludes. It was Agathon who first began this practice. And yet what difference is there between singing interludes and fitting a speech or whole scene from one play into another?

(*Poetics* 1456a 25–32)

It is only in the early plays of Aristophanes that we see the chorus, as Aristotle believes it should be, taking the part of an actor. Usually it provides opposition to one of the main

characters and thus plays some part in advancing the plot. Clearly this is not the case in *Ekklesiazusai* where the chorus simply supports the main character, Praxagora. In the last two plays of Aristophanes the chorus is providing little more than the interludes to which Aristotle refers. At lines 729 and 876 in *Ekklesiazusai* we merely have the word $\chi\omicron\omicron\omicron\upsilon$. We do not know what the chorus sang at this point or even if it sang (see my note on line 729) but we may assume that it was almost entirely irrelevant as far as the plot is concerned, particularly at this stage in the action, and may have been a collection of traditional songs rather than new compositions.

The reasons for the decline of the chorus are the subject of debate. It has often been said that the attendant expense of twenty-four extra people was too much for the impoverished, post-war Athens and indeed that the climate of the day weighed heavily against the rôle of the chorus as we see it in the early plays of Aristophanes. Attacks on politicians such as we have noted in the parabasis of earlier plays were probably more dangerous for poets in the post-war era when the old freedom of speech had been curtailed. Such an analysis is almost certainly an over-simplification. The break in the comic tradition which occurs at the end of the Peloponnesian War and the transition from old to middle comedy is a fundamental change in subject matter and dramatic composition and structure. Politicians and politics were of little interest to the disillusioned Athenian audience and the move towards social comedy almost by definition requires that the chorus should play a smaller part. The splendour of animal and bird choruses belongs to the fantastic plots of old comedy. It was increasingly difficult to incorporate such elements in the movement towards realism.

The trend towards the demise of the chorus was continued in the last extant play of Aristophanes. In *Wealth* the chorus and chorus leader have between them only forty-two lines. Such evidence as we have for Aristophanes' later works seems to show the culmination of this trend. His son Araros acted as producer for his last two plays, *Aiolosikon* and *Kokalos*. Of these we are told that the former had no choral songs at all, and the same may well have been true of the latter since it is said to have been concerned with a love affair and seduction, the traditional themes of new comedy.

I have covered the general decline of the chorus in some detail. Now briefly sketch out the part which the chorus plays in *Ekklesiazusai*, its entrances and exits, and note the evidence for its declining rôle.



Discussion

The chorus gradually assembles between lines 30 and 56. It then remains on the stage saying nothing until it is left alone (l. 284). After a brief song in which it is split into two groups it goes off to the assembly having added nothing positive to the action, although we might presume that the women have added to the spectacle and, by their numerous presence, to the verisimilitude of the action.

At line 478 they return to tell of the successful venture. Again they are not essential to the action since Praxagora, on her return, could and does tell what has happened. They are urged to stay around (l. 517) and eventually introduce the debate between Praxagora and her husband (ll. 571–82). At line 724 they depart with Praxagora.

At line 1112 the chorus reappear again, this time with the servant girl, in order to take part in the general hilarity at the end of the play.

The chorus in *Ekklesiazusai* is not involved in a traditional parabasis. Its presence is therefore something of an anachronism but, since it is there, it has to be linked in with the action of the play. *Ekklesiazusai* has a reasonably structured plot and there is therefore less opportunity for the traditional unstructured appearance of the chorus. The chorus seems merely to 'stand around' and there is little motivation for its entrances and exits.

There are a number of reasons for the demise of the chorus and I list here only the major ones I have mentioned. The attempt to increase the dramatic element, to foster continuity and realism, meant that there was no part for the fantastic chorus of old

comedy. The parabasis had been the springboard for the dramatist to offer his own views, through the agency of the chorus, whether about politicians of the day or about his rival playwrights. In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War such freedom of speech was considerably curtailed. The cost of equipping the chorus, particularly if it was dressed in animal costumes, was considerable and, after the war, individual citizens could no longer afford this expense. The fourth century saw the spread of Athenian culture well beyond the boundaries of Attica. The parabasis was full of topical and local Athenian allusions and would reduce the possibility of a wider appeal for the play.



Figure 6 Chorus of men dressed as women. Detail from Attic black figure cup 3356. (Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam.)

You should remember that *Ekklesiazusai*, like any play, is the product of a particular age and a particular civilization. You will know a good deal now about the civilization from your general reading and in particular from Units 7 and 8, *Athenian Social History*. If your memory of the political and economic history of the period is a little rusty, you will find it very useful to read quickly through the first two parts of Section 1 of Unit 9. This will not take you long and you will be better able to follow the comments on Aristophanes' aims as a dramatist in the next section.

6 ARISTOPHANES, REFORMER OR JESTER?

It is possible with some degree of certainty to penetrate the dramatic masks of Aeschylus and Euripides but an assessment of Aristophanes is far more difficult, as can be seen from the variety of opinions which have been, and are held, concerning his aims and objectives as a comic dramatist.

To some he has appeared as an ardent patriot, attempting to reform society and government. If he was a reformer, he was singularly lacking in success. His plans for peace in *Acharnians*, *Peace* and *Lysistrata* fell on deaf ears and it was only humiliating defeat which brought peace for Athens. His attacks on politicians of the time never forced any of them to withdraw. He attacked the philosophers for their new education and Euripides for his attempts to change tragedy but with no tangible success as far as we are aware. To others he has appeared to be the opposite extreme, a jester who sought to produce laughter. Aristophanes is certainly more than a jester. His attacks upon politicians, political systems and contemporary ideas were sustained and coherent. Are these extremes necessarily mutually exclusive?

Perhaps we might hope to see Aristophanes' objectives more clearly against the background of his audience for we might safely assume that, in order to win the prize for comedy, he must have carried with him the majority of his audience.

Before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War the city and rural populations which made up 'the Athenian people' had little contact with each other and subscribed to different sets of values. The urban population were the minority and consisted of merchants, business men and artisans of all types. Their daily contact with foreigners presented them with new ideas and new cultures. In a word they were progressive. The rural majority lived on farms and were engaged in agriculture. Theirs was a conservative tradition untouched from year to year by new ideas except when they visited the city itself. The war forced this rural population to seek refuge within the walls of Athens. Hitherto, by staying in the country the rural population had left the assembly and the law courts in the hands of the minority. The war changed all this.

Of course, even before the war, the Great Dionysia and the Lenaea had been dominated by the rural population since these were two of the few occasions when all men came into the city. However, after the outbreak of war, this rural majority, which had paid scant attention to politicians and the organization of the democracy, was forced, by its proximity and by the war which united all Athenians in self-preservation, to become acquainted with politics and the new ideas. We can imagine that the process was painful and confusing to men steeped in a conservative rural tradition.

We do not know for certain whether Aristophanes came from this rural population. However, his plays are full of references to husbandry and country customs which are so real and vivid that it would appear that he must have spent some part of his life in the countryside of Attica. Yet comic poets could not rise from the countryside straight to success in the festivals since their work had to be known and accepted by the Archon (see p. 14), and Aristophanes must have spent some time also in literary circles in Athens in order to accumulate experience and thus to gain admittance to the dramatic competition.

Aristophanes sides with the rural population against the clamour for war. The farming population did not believe in war, only in defence. A build-up of the fleet and naval expeditions were alien to their thought. Whatever the result in the long-term, in the short-term it was they who would be the losers since it was their lands in the countryside of Attica which stood open to attack (there is a reference to this in *Ekklesiazusai* ll. 197 ff.). But it is not just because of their attitude to the war that Aristophanes attacks contemporary politicians. The rise of the demagogues, such as Kleon, brought with them a spirit of suspicion. The people were split into factions. The powers of the assembly were increased and democracy gave way to oligarchy and despotism. All this was alien

to the Athenian character as Thukydides describes it (see what he has to say in Book II 37–41), the simple elegance and restraint, the freedom of the individual.

Aristophanes' objectives in *Ekklesiazusai* must be seen in the light of post-war politics. After the confusion at the end of the war, the democracy had re-emerged, if not entirely unscathed. In general, people seemed inclined to accept this form of government for the future. Schemes for constitutional reform were still put forward but not within the context of real politics and political parties. They were reserved for the consideration of philosophers and for ridicule on the stage.

In *Ekklesiazusai* we no longer have the fervent attacks upon politicians of the day but we still have a political satire, at least in the first part of the play. The position of Athens in 393 was precarious, to say the least. She had allied herself with Thebes, Korinth and Argos, and later with the Persians. War had continued and, although the Persians had provided subsidies, the economic burden was crushing. Once more the population was split. On one side were those who relied on the continuation of the war in order that they might retain their source of pay, on the other side were those who owned the land and manufactured goods who were required to provide the increasing contributions. Economic problems led to moral problems and the spirit of Athens sank to a lower ebb.

What do we learn from *Ekklesiazusai* of the state of Athens at this time?



Discussion

The opening scenes of *Ekklesiazusai* contain numerous references to the deplorable government, bereft of any policy (ll. 108 ff.) and making crazy laws (ll. 137 ff.). Its leading statesmen were untrustworthy and unstable (ll. 176 ff.) and its citizens could be bought for a pittance (ll. 183 ff.). The people were putting self-interest before the interest of the state (ll. 181 ff.). The notion of community of wealth and women with which the second part of the play is concerned serves to highlight by comic exaggeration the futility of systems in which the individual puts self-interest before the state. These expressions of Aristophanes' opinion are ones which would be likely to meet with approval from the rural population.

What can we say of the purpose of Aristophanes? There is considerable continuity of theme in his works although they span a period of cataclysmic change in Athens. The theme is the purity of the Athenian tradition, the honest simplicity of the rural population, uninterested in the machinations of the law courts and the assembly but deeply interested in the preservation of a unique spirit and a unique set of values. Comedy by definition has a happy ending — good triumphs over bad. Yet it would be wrong to see good and bad in concrete terms; they should be seen in comic terms. In a sense Aristophanes was always in opposition. He was in opposition to the political, social, religious and literary innovations of his day. These he attacked by means of parody and exaggeration. As such they were the evil over which a traditional and conservative good triumphed. Yet Aristophanes' aim is not the return of the halcyon days of pre-war Athenian democracy. Had he lived and worked twenty-five years earlier his parody of individuals and innovations is hardly likely to have been any less intense. If he is against the war, we must not necessarily see him as a member of a political anti-war faction. An end to the war is an ideal as far as he is concerned. He does not see it as a politician in terms of a specific settlement on precise terms.

Perhaps some mention ought to be made at this stage of the 'communism' propounded by Praxagora, and Aristophanes' intent in introducing this theme. The two major innovative notions which are introduced are the community of property (ll. 590 ff.) and the community of women and children (ll. 613 ff.). To us these issues seem to be entirely

separate but to the Greeks they were inextricably intertwined. Marriage amongst Athenians did not arise principally because either or both partners fell in love. It was the girl's father who decided whom she should marry and the marriage itself was a mechanism for the transmission of property, the girl and her dowry, from her father through her husband and ultimately to her male children. To some extent, therefore, property and women were synonymous. Plato in the *Republic* has much the same thing to say concerning the community of women and children although his community of property was confined to one class of people, namely the guardians. There has been extensive scholarly discussion of the relation between Plato and Aristophanes in connection with the theme of communism. The *Republic* did not appear until some years after the production of *Ekklesiazusai*. Did Plato expand on Aristophanes? After all Praxagora's suggestion is not just a light-hearted comment. The implications have been thought out in some considerable detail. Alternatively, did Aristophanes set down and parody doctrines which Plato was already discussing openly in Athens but did not set down in writing for some time? Perhaps these alternatives are not mutually exclusive. Community of women and property had been mentioned before this time. Herodotos had mentioned the customs of the Skythians and Libyans. Phaleas of Chalkedon had, almost a decade before *Ekklesiazusai*, come up with a plan for the equalization of property, a common education programme and nationalization of industry. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that 'communism' was a topic of debate in educated circles of the time and even perhaps of popular interest, the Greek intellect being peculiarly susceptible to anything so novel. I do not myself believe that it is essential to see in the coincidence of particular details clear dependency of Aristophanes on Plato or vice versa.

Aristophanes' overriding aim is to make his fellow citizens think. In order to do so he seeks to show that innovation, in whatever field it appears, is not necessarily progression. Sometimes innovation leads to a dead-end, sometimes it appears as progression but is, in reality, regression. Aristophanes is the Athenian conscience. By creating a fantasy which has obvious affinities to reality for his audience, he holds up a mirror and demands 'know thyself'.

I have concluded that Aristophanes had a serious intent. Yet that serious intent was achieved through comedy and it would be wrong to leave him without a brief examination of his humour. Aristophanes' humour is meant for the packed theatre in Athens. His audience was in festive mood and many of them had travelled far to the celebrations. They had brought their food and drink with them and some might well have been a little tipsy. As members of a relatively small community, both numerically and geographically, his audience would be well aware of the leading politicians of the day as well as those who had achieved notoriety by other means. This is the sort of audience that Aristophanes had to seize and hold.

In general the Greeks, and for that matter the Romans, seem to have laughed at the same sort of things that we do today. However, humour is a personal thing to some extent. What we laugh at varies from one individual to another. More importantly, the situation in which we see or hear something humorous is very significant for our appreciation of the humour. If you witness some comic entertainment at the theatre you are likely to be influenced in your perception of the comic elements by the attitude of the rest of the audience — if they laugh you are likely to laugh, if they do not laugh you are less likely to laugh. Bawdy and coarse jokes, barrack-room humour as it is sometimes called, depend to a considerable extent on the initial willingness of some members of the audience to be receptive to this form of humour. Once the ice has been broken most people will join in. In order to appreciate some types of humour we have to let ourselves go, to divorce ourselves from our immediate, everyday social morality. The theatre audience can do this by losing individual personalities in the anonymity of the crowd. We can do the same thing today but we can also achieve anonymity through distance. Have you not been in a situation where you are sitting alone listening to the radio or watching the television and you have laughed at something which you would not have laughed at or certainly would not have found so amusing if someone else had also been in the room at the same time?

You will now have read through Aristophanes' play and my notes at least twice. You are unlikely to have seen it performed and you will not, therefore, have encountered the infectious humour of the theatre. However, you are likely to have read the play by yourself and you might, therefore, have been able to attain some anonymity and detachment. What do you recall as the basic types of humour in Aristophanes and what examples can you give?



Discussion

This is a very open-ended question and each of us will offer a personal list. My own is not presented in order of importance and may or may not contain your favourite comic pieces. Moreover, some of the examples fall into more than one category.

Certain attributes or activities of well known individuals — whether real, imagined or merely exaggerated we do not know — are frequently mentioned: the hairiness of Epikrates (l. 71), Lysikrates' snub nose (l. 630) and dyed hair (l. 736), Smoios' preoccupation with cunnilingus (l. 847) and the feminine appearance of Epigonos (ll. 167 ff.).

Certain character types appear by convention to have particular comic attributes. Women are always gossiping (l. 120), they are fond of drink (ll. 15 and 227), they cheat on their husbands (l. 225). Similarly husbands are mean, they lock up not only drink but also food (ll. 14 ff.); they are cuckolds (l. 225) and consequently suspicious of their wives (ll. 520 ff.). Scatological humour is covered at length in the substantial scene between Blepyros and the man (ll. 311 ff.).

Sexual humour and innuendoes are a major ingredient of the final scenes involving the Young Man, the Young Girl and the Old Women. Double meanings of words or individual phrases are common and these often have scatological or sexual connotations (l. 648).

You might have listed the women's masquerade which forms the basic theme of the play as humorous in itself and in certain of its particulars, especially in the rehearsal scene. References to the standard comic dress are also common. Even if you do not appreciate some aspects of this humour I think you will be forced to agree that Aristophanes never misses a trick. His bawdy comedy is rumbustious and vigorous, his wit and characterization is biting and his sense of the dramatic possibilities most acute. Having seized his audience through his wit and humour the successful transmission of his message is assured.

7 EKKLESIAZUSAI IN THE TRADITION OF COMEDY

Ekklesiazusai and *Wealth*, the last two plays of Aristophanes, are, as I have mentioned, the only complete plays of middle comedy which have come down to us. The outstanding dramatists of middle comedy appear to have been Antiphanes and Alexis, but of them we have only fragments although their combined output was said to exceed 500 plays. We can see certain traits in the last two plays of Aristophanes which are developed more fully in Menander and in the twenty-seven plays of Plautus and Terence, the Roman dramatists who copied plots, scenes and often lines to a greater or lesser extent from the works of new comedy. Unfortunately, however, the evidence for the use of middle comedy by the Roman dramatists is obscure. Two of Plautus' plays, *Amphitruo* and *Persa* are said to have been derived from originals of the middle comedy period, the former being the only extant Roman comedy with a mythological theme, and the latter being a coarse farce culminating in conspicuous revelry. Neither therefore fit into the traditional definition of new comedy but, since we do not have the Greek originals of these plays, we cannot say how much is Plautine addition and remodelling.

In *Ekklesiazusai*, the scene between Chremes and the citizen (Pheidolos in some translations) (ll. 746 ff.) is the earliest which we have in which two old men, one kindly the other stern, are contrasted. The courtesan does not appear as a speaking character in the earlier works of Aristophanes but we see her, at least as a subsidiary character, in the closing scenes of *Ekklesiazusai*. Indeed, the old woman, a merciless caricature of the aged courtesan, is contrasted with the idealization of the young courtesan. In both these comparisons we find the beginnings of the development of human character and the examination of its strengths and weaknesses which are the mark of new comedy. This move from fantastic situations and activities to the development of characterization is essential for the development of plot and dramatic reality. Characters and rôles must be defined and delimited. The plot must develop along the lines of the characters which have been depicted. The plot, as Aristotle tells us (*Poetics* 1451b 11), is a combination of probable incidents. If the plot appears to demand that the characters act outside their defined rôles, we may safely assume either that our conception of the real plot is wrong and the true situation will be revealed, or that the dramatist wishes to redefine the limits previously imposed on a character. The character must speak and act in character. Dramatic probability and hence coherent structure are thus maintained.

In *Ekklesiazusai*, we see the beginnings of character types and characterization and to some extent dramatic probability. By the time of Menander the transition is complete. Of what happened in between we have little evidence as we have seen above. As in all literary traditions it would be wrong to see the development as a logical progression in strict chronological terms but rather as a series of experiments which finally have their goal in a new form of drama. However, this is clearly the verdict of hindsight. There were forward-looking and backward-looking plays in the period of middle comedy but the trend was not purely fortuitous. As we have seen in the discussion on the demise of the chorus, social, economic and political conditions played a significant part.

In Menander the art of characterization and coherent plot structure reaches its zenith and directly influences the comedy of western Europe. Menander was considered by later antiquity as the foremost comic dramatist and his works, with their timeless theme of love-affairs and recognition of long-lost children, were performed long after his death, an honour which is unlikely to have fallen to Aristophanes or any writers of old comedy, if only because their work was so much a product of a particular time. Western drama owes much more to the development of Greek comic drama than it does to any other branch of classical literature be it epic poetry, elegy, lyric, satire, history or philosophy. The plays of Menander were copied extensively by Roman dramatists, in particular Plautus and Terence; the Roman dramatists were themselves copied, often word-for-word, by Renaissance dramatists. Lodovico Ariosto, the sixteenth-century Italian

dramatist, often considered the true founder of the modern European stage, embraces the form and spirit of Plautus and Terence but in an Italian setting. His *I Suppositi*, which draws on *Eunuchus* of Terence and *Captivi* of Plautus, provided the model for Gascoigne's *The Supposes* (1566), the first prose comedy of English literature. Nicholas Udall had already produced the first English comedy but in verse, *Ralph Roister Doister* (c. 1552), drawing on *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus with additional elements from *Eunuchus*. This pattern was mirrored in Spain, France, Germany and Holland in the same century.

Shakespeare and Ben Jonson in England, Corneille and Molière in France, continued to draw from Roman comedy and thus indirectly from Greek new comedy. Shadwell and Fielding followed in this tradition, referring back sometimes directly to Roman drama, sometimes indirectly through earlier European dramatists. The influence of new comedy is omnipresent even if it is to a greater or lesser extent forgotten. *The Boys from Syracuse* is an adaptation by George Abbott of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* which itself is taken from *Menaechmi* of Plautus. The original of *Menaechmi* perhaps belonged to the transitional period between middle comedy and the fully developed new comedy. In Abbott's modern musical comedy, enacting the plot through song and dance, we may well in many ways be approaching nearer to the ancient presentation than we do in Shakespeare's version.

It would be wrong to look for the influence of new comedy only in comic drama. Its influence on western culture is much wider. If you go to the opera and see Verdi's *La Traviata* you will, perhaps, read in the programme notes that the story is taken from Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias*. If you are impressed by the scene between Giorgio and Violetta where the old man tells the courtesan to keep away from his son, look up the works of Terence in your local library and read Act V of his *Hecyra*. The scene has been transposed, with various accretions, from Roman drama. Terence took his play from another Greek dramatist, Apollodoros. Apollodoros was beginning his career as Menander's career ended.

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Text and Notes

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Unit 12

EKKLESIAZUSAI
by Aristophanes

Translated by David Sewart

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

Greek comedy poses particular problems for the translator. Much of the comic allusion is relevant only to Athenian society and to Athenian society of a particular period. For the modern reader caricature of politicians of the day is at best difficult to understand, at worst unintelligible. Furthermore, Greek drama is in verse and the verse itself, often varying quite considerably, particularly in the choral episodes, provides a particular flavour. The translator of *Ekklesiazusai* has additional problems. There are seven manuscripts in which the play is preserved in part or in whole. The earliest of these dates to the tenth century AD, the rest to the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. All except the tenth century manuscript have been amended by Byzantine scholars (see p. 11). Punctuation, the division of lines and even attribution to speakers often varies quite considerably. Indeed, our earliest manuscript only rarely identifies speakers. The translator must therefore determine a text and divide this amongst the speakers before he can begin his task.

For the purpose of this translation I have normally followed the recent text of R. G. Ussher and the ascription of the characters which is made in that edition. Ussher's edition of *Ekklesiazusai* is by far the best available and those of you who have some knowledge of Greek or a specific interest in particular points might like to consult this edition and its extensive notes.

In translating I have attempted to be as literal as possible, following the Greek text almost line by line. Thus the reader may cross-refer to other editions and notes with ease. (Note that where a line is indented it is part of the previous line in the original Greek verse.) I have not attempted to bring out the feeling of the changes in verse. This I believe to be an impossible task but you might like to look at other translations which do attempt it (that of Rogers in volume III of the Loeb Classical Library should be available through your library).

Since I have kept as close as possible to the Greek text the precise meaning of certain phrases might appear a little obscure at first reading. I have provided notes where I think some elucidation is necessary. You might like to read, as a comparison, the translation by Douglass Parker in the Mentor Classic series. You will see that it is far different from my own — indeed at first you might be surprised that we are translating the same play. Parker, however, is trying to provide a translation for the stage and, as he says in his introduction, he has 'assimilated the obscure to the familiar'.

I hope that my literal translation and the notes which I have provided make the play not only readable but interesting. What you are lacking is any overall impression of the verse, particularly in the choral parts. You should however be able to get a good idea of the detailed content of a Greek comedy.

PREFACE

Let us look briefly at the possible circumstances of the first production of *Ekklesiazusai*. It is more than a decade since the fall of Athens and much has happened in that time to change the political climate. We are attending a religious festival at which a number of plays are to be performed and the crowd is imbued with a holiday spirit. Many of us have travelled long distances to attend. We enter the theatre to take our places. It is a vast area with room to seat upwards of 15,000 and completely open to the elements. Since it is early in the year (January or March) there is no guarantee that we will not get wet since we are going to be here for most of the day. Certainly we will need to be well wrapped up — even at midday it will be quite cool. The religious ceremony itself commences at dawn. This ceremony is not just a preliminary to the dramatic production but a complex and time-honoured institution involving the purification of the audience and the pouring of libations to the god Dionysos. Only after this is complete can the plays begin.

The plays themselves will be quite short, if we are to judge by modern standards. Even the longest tragedies take little more than an hour and a half to act out and *Ekklesiazusai*, a short play even by Greek standards, will be completed in an hour. At the City Dionysia the five plays will not take up more than six hours. However, there will be intervals between the plays and it will be mid-afternoon before the day's events are complete. Since there are no programmes each of the plays is preceded by an announcement of its title and author. As far as the setting of the play and the characters themselves are concerned, this we must pick up as the play unfolds.

Perhaps, finally, I should refer to the obscene language and double entendre which occurs throughout the play. Most of the words which I have translated as 'knock', 'bang', 'poke', etc. are used as slang terms for sexual intercourse. There are a large number of words with phallic connotations such as 'pole', 'stiff', 'straight' etc. We know that the word which I have translated as 'pot' or 'honeypot' (ll. 253, 847, 1176) was used as a slang term for the vagina. We may safely assume that Aristophanes intended the double meaning in words of this sort. In reading a translation you must look carefully for them; in a production on the stage they would be obvious from the use of stress, pause and general manner of delivery.

The scene is a street in Athens. In the background there is a single house-door and an altar. There are two further entrances. That on the right as we look at the stage leads by convention to the town, that on the left to the country.

Enter Praxagora from a side entrance. She carries a small lamp and is disguised as a man.

PRAXAGORA	<p>O shining light of my terracotta lamp, most beautifully made by skilful men, I intend to reveal your pedigree and your fortunes. Born from the potter's whirling wheel now in your nostrils you have the bright duties of the sun. Raise the agreed signal of flame.</p>	5
	<p>To you alone, and rightly so, we show ourselves, since in our rooms you stand beside us as we try out the positions of love making, watching over our arched bodies;</p>	10
	<p>no one shuts your eye out of the house. Alone you shine into the secret nooks of our thighs, singeing away the hair that grows there. As we secretly open the store-houses full of grain and wine you stand beside us.</p>	15
	<p>Although you share in all this, you don't babble to the neighbours. So you will learn of our present plans as well, decided at the Skira by my friends. But there's no-one here. They should have come. It's getting on for dawn and the assembly</p>	20
	<p>will soon begin. We'll have to take our seats and settle our limbs down carefully as Phyromachos once said, if you remember. What can the matter be? Haven't they got their beards sewed on as we agreed they should?</p>	25
	<p>Or was it difficult for them to steal their husbands' cloaks and not get caught? Look, there's a lamp coming.</p>	

Notes

- Line 1** Praxagora's soliloquy is couched in the language of tragedy. It may indeed be a send up of a well known tragic opening. In tragedy of course the invocations would be to the sun (you might like to compare the beginning of Euripides' play, *Phoenissai*, which begins 'O Sun, you who cut a path amongst the stars of heaven and ride upon a chariot made of gold'). Aristophanes chooses instead to eulogize a common earthenware lamp. A tragedian would make great play of the heroic acts witnessed by the sun each day. Aristophanes, in parody, makes comic capital of the more mundane and coarse sights to which a lamp is witness.
- Line 17** We now begin to get some notion of the plot but there are only vague hints, namely that a group of women are involved, the plot concerns a meeting of the assembly, and the women are going to disguise themselves with men's clothes.
- Line 18** The Skira was a women's festival which took place in June in honour of the goddess Athena.
- Line 23** Phyromachos, it appears, was possibly an actor or more likely a politician who was famous for a wrong pronunciation — possibly a Spoonerism or malapropism. The precise nature of the joke is lost to us since the Greek text is particularly corrupt at this point.
- Line 27** Just as we are expecting a full exposition of the plot Praxagora is cut short by the approach of the other women. We might guess that the women intend to take over the assembly but if we are in suspense, we will just have to wait until line 107 for a definite indication. Meanwhile the comic possibilities of women trying to sneak out with their husbands' clothes and false beards are too much for Aristophanes to resist.

Well now I'll draw back again,
just in case it happens to be a man coming.

She steps back towards the house.

The First Woman enters with a torch from the left. She is one of the members of the chorus who begin to straggle on carrying or wearing various parts of their disguises, beards, cloaks, walking sticks and shoes.

FIRST WOMAN It's time to be going. As I was coming here just now
the herald gave his second cock a doodle doo.

30

PRAXAGORA *Coming forward again.*
Well I've been waiting for you lot
all night long. I'll just scratch on the door
to call my neighbour here out of her house.
Her husband mustn't hear it.

Praxagora has just begun to scratch when the Second Woman enters from the house door.

SECOND WOMAN I heard you
scratching with your fingers as I was putting my shoes on.
Not that I've had a wink of sleep. That husband of mine,
my dear. What a sturdy oarsman I'm married to.
All night long he's been rowing me on the bed.
I've only just managed to pinch his cloak.

35

PRAXAGORA Oh good. I see Kleinarete and Sostrate
coming now and here's Philainete.

FIRST WOMAN Won't you hurry up? Glyke swore that
whoever came last should pay a fine —
twelve litres of wine and a measure of chick-peas.

40

SECOND WOMAN Do look at Melistiche, Smikythion's wife,
slipping along in her husband's shoes.

FIRST WOMAN Yes, and as I see it
she's the only one who left home without trouble from her husband.

SECOND WOMAN Look here's Geusistrate, the landlord's wife, isn't it?

Notes

Line 30 The women who enter at this point form part of the comic chorus totalling twenty-four. Sometimes a chorus enters *en masse*, sometimes singly. It seems likely that just a few of the chorus enter at this point, including, principally, the First Woman and Second Woman who take part in the dialogue.

Line 41 The rest of the chorus now come in either singly or in pairs. It has been suggested that they are distinguished by name because they are well known to the audience. This may or may not be true. Certainly there is no evidence for it. The names by which they are addressed are typical Athenian names.

Line 47 We might assume that Melistiche is making exaggerated attempts to run, her movements being restricted by the fact that she is wearing a very large pair of shoes, her husband's. The rest of the women appear to be carrying their footwear.

	She's got the light from the pub in her hand.	50
FIRST WOMAN	And now I can see the wives of Philodoretos and Chairetades coming along with lots and lots of others, all the women of any worth in the city. <i>The chorus leader brings up the rear; the whole chorus of twenty-four women is now assembled.</i>	
CHORUS LEADER	My dear, the devil of a job I had to creep away. My husband stuffed himself with anchovies at supper and kept on belching all night long.	55
PRAXAGORA	Sit down then, I want to ask you, now that I see you're assembled, whether you've done all we resolved at the Skira. <i>The women sit down round the edges of the orchestra. Praxagora remains standing near the altar.</i>	
FIRST WOMAN	I have grown hair under my arm pits thicker than a jungle — just as we agreed. And when my husband went off to the market I used to oil my body all over throughout the day and get myself a sun tan.	60
SECOND WOMAN	So did I. I threw away my razor to begin with, so as to get hairy all over and look nothing like a woman any more.	65
PRAXAGORA	But have you got the beards which we determined all of you should have when we assembled?	
FIRST WOMAN	By Hekate — here it is — a beauty.	70
SECOND WOMAN	Me too. And much more beautiful than Epikrates'. <i>Praxagora turns to the chorus.</i>	
PRAXAGORA	And what about you lot?	
FIRST WOMAN	They have, they're nodding their heads.	
PRAXAGORA	Well, I see that you've carried out the other instructions — you've got men's shoes and walking sticks	

Notes

- Line 54** The speaker of these lines cannot be the First or Second Woman. Possibly she is the Chorus Leader and, on her arrival, the chorus is complete.
- Line 62** Athenian women spent a very considerable part of the day inside the house in the women's quarters. Their skin was therefore light when compared to men who were out and about at business or leisure.
- Line 70** We know that in Athens, and particularly amongst women, the worship of Hekate was popular. For the most part there does not seem to be particular significance in the gods and goddesses addressed in oaths. There are, however, some clear exceptions as you will see from my note on line 155, and possibly some other case where the reference to a particular deity might have a special meaning (see my note on line 445). In comedy oaths and promises do not play the same part or have the same significance as you will have seen in tragedy (see in particular Unit 6, § 5.3).
- Line 71** Epikrates was an Athenian politician of the day whose hairy face was a butt for comic writers. He was a member of the pro-war faction and was at one time accused of receiving bribes while on an embassy to Persia.

	and men's cloaks, just as we suggested.	75
FIRST WOMAN	I've brought out Lamios' stick at any rate. He was asleep and didn't notice.	
SECOND WOMAN	It's that well known farter's stick.	
PRAXAGORA	By Zeus the Saviour — he'd be just the man — none better, if he put on Argos' goat-skin coat, to keep an eye on the public executioner. But let's see that we complete what's left while the stars are still in the sky. The Assembly which we've made preparations to attend will begin at dawn.	80 85
FIRST WOMAN	Yes by Zeus. And you must get a seat beneath the rostrum right opposite the chairman.	
SECOND WOMAN	I was going to bring this stuff, by Zeus, to card some wool while the Assembly's filling up.	
PRAXAGORA	While it's filling up, you fool?	
FIRST WOMAN	By Artemis — yes. Why can't I listen just as well when I'm carding wool? My children haven't anything to put on.	90
PRAXAGORA	Carding wool! — when not an inch of your body must be put on display. We'd be for it sure enough if the Assembly is full and some woman steps over a seat, lets her clothes get caught and shows her curlies. But no one will spot us if we sit in front and gather our cloaks around us. When we've fastened our beards and let them flow down, who wouldn't think us men to look at? Even Agyrrhios passes as a man — now he has Pronomos' beard. Yet previously he was a woman. At the moment, as you see, he's a prominent politician. It's because of him you know — I swear by the dawning day —	95 100 105

Notes

- Line 76** 'Stick' here has phallic connotations. We may presume that the First Woman is carrying a small one. You should generally bear in mind when reading this translation the possible *double entendre* of such words as 'stick', 'rod' and the female parallels. It might seem strange to us that obscenity should exist at all in a religious festival but we must remember the origins of comedy (see § 2) and the overtly sexual nature of the costumes (see § 5). Nothing is known of Lamios. Presumably, however, the audience would associate the name with Lamia, famed in comedy for her flatulence. Hence the reference in the next line.
- Line 79** Clearly there is a coarse joke continuing over some three lines but its precise nature is obscure. In mythology Argos was a shepherd famed because his eyes were always open.
- Line 93** Praxagora wants them all to get to the assembly early for two reasons: firstly, so that they can get good seats and not lose the opportunity of speaking, secondly, so that they can arrange themselves carefully in their seats, making sure that no hint of their femininity is visible before the men come along.
- Line 102** Agyrrhios was a demagogue who was at the height of his power and influence at about the time of the production of this play. Presumably his appearance was somewhat effeminate. He it was who introduced payment for attendance at the assembly. He is held up to mockery here and later (ll.184–5). The fact that he was also responsible for lowering the payment to comic poets is not likely to have endeared him to Aristophanes. Of Pronomos we know nothing but may assume that his beard was the topic of popular remarks.

	that we'll dare to pull a coup as big as this in the hope of being able to take over the affairs of state so as to do some good to the city. At the moment we can't move forward at all — either with sails or oars.	
FIRST WOMAN	How can a gathering of women, with women's minds, address the Assembly?	110
PRAXAGORA	Perfectly well if I'm not mistaken. Don't they say that the boys who've been screwed the most are by far the sharpest orators? Well being screwed comes naturally to us!	
FIRST WOMAN	I'm not sure. It's frightening when you haven't done it before.	115
PRAXAGORA	Haven't we gathered here just for that purpose — to practise beforehand what we'll have to say there? You can't be too quick getting your beards on and the same goes for the rest of you who've been practising how to talk.	
FIRST WOMAN	Practising how to talk you say? Which of us needs practice?	120
PRAXAGORA	Come on then, fasten your beard on and become a man at once. I'll set down the garlands and put on mine with the rest of you in case I want to make a speech.	
SECOND WOMAN	Darling Praxagora, look here, my dear. It's the funniest thing I ever saw.	125
PRAXAGORA	What's funny about it?	
SECOND WOMAN	It's just like putting beards on fried cuttle-fish.	
PRAXAGORA	The purifying priest must now carry round the ferret. Move forward. Ariphrades! Stop chattering. Come forward and sit down. Who wants to address the meeting?	130
	<i>The First Woman rises and moves towards Praxagora by the altar.</i>	
FIRST WOMAN	I do.	

Notes

- Line 118** It is likely that when the chorus appeared most of them were carrying their shoes, cloaks, walking sticks and beards. They now begin a rehearsal for the assembly. Praxagora has also brought some other items (ll.122 ff.), the traditional garlands which are handed to the speakers in the assembly to wear as they rise to speak.
- Line 126** The women have put on dark beards and this contrasts with their light skin (see note on l. 62). Their skin is the colour of a lightly fried cuttlefish. The Second Woman could have chosen many other things of similar colour. Why does she choose a fried cuttlefish? Probably this is another example of the difficulty the women have in aspiring to the assembly. Their minds are engaged on their daily work and experiences as we have previously seen (ll.88 ff.).
- Line 128** Praxagora has a somewhat confused idea of the procedures in the assembly and she acts the part of presiding officer and herald in this rehearsal. Moreover, while the purifying officer did indeed carry an animal, it was a pig and not a ferret. This latter mistake would cause amusement not only because it is a mistake. The Greek word for pig is also a slang word for the female genitalia and we may assume that the audience would appreciate this subtle transposition.
- Line 129** Ariphrades is referred to by Aristophanes in *Knights* and *Wasps* as a well-known pervert. Perhaps even thirty years later the same man was in the audience. A further reference to a member of the audience is made at l.167.

PRAXAGORA	Put this garland on and good luck to you.	
FIRST WOMAN	There.	
PRAXAGORA	Please speak.	
FIRST WOMAN	Am I to speak before I drink?	
PRAXAGORA	Drink!	
FIRST WOMAN	Why else have I got this garland on then?	
PRAXAGORA	Don't waste time. Is this what you'd have done in Assembly too?	
FIRST WOMAN	Why not? Don't they drink there too?	135
PRAXAGORA	'Don't they drink?' you say!	
FIRST WOMAN	By Artemis they do. And strong stuff at that. The laws they pass — if you look at them carefully — are like the crazy acts of drunks. And what's more, by Zeus, they pour libations. What reason is there for such lengthy prayers if there's no wine there? And anyway, they quarrel like drunks and the police cart them off when they get out of hand.	140
PRAXAGORA	Go and sit down. You're no good. <i>The First Woman goes back to her seat complaining.</i>	
FIRST WOMAN	I wish by Zeus I'd never worn this beard. I think I'll die of thirst.	145
PRAXAGORA	Is there anyone else who wants to speak? I do. <i>The Second Woman leaves her place and comes forward.</i>	
PRAXAGORA	Come on, put this garland on. Now we're really off. Come on, see that you speak properly like a man, and lean your weight on your walking stick.	150
SECOND WOMAN	'I would have preferred one of the customary speakers to have the floor so that I could sit quietly by. But now, as far as my one vote goes, I won't allow them to put tanks of water in the pubs. It isn't right. By the two goddesses — it isn't.'	155

Notes

- Line 132** It was not only the public speakers who wore a garland (see note on l.118). Those attending banquets and revelry also did, and, after putting on their garlands, were presumably offered a drink. The First Woman associates the garland with a banquet rather than a public speech and consequently asks for a drink. Aristophanes uses this mistake to comic effect in the subsequent lines suggesting that some of the laws enacted by the assembly must be the work of drunkards (ll.137 ff.).
- Line 143** The 'police' were a body of Scythians — not Athenian citizens — who were retained as a police force. There were initially some 300 of them.
- Line 153** The Second Woman bemoans the common practice of watering down wine. Secret tippling by women is commonly referred to in comedy. Hence when the woman has the opportunity of speaking and proposing 'to do some good to the city' (l.108), Aristophanes ironically has her propose something so trifling and comic.
- Line 155** By convention there were some oaths which belonged exclusively to women and some to men. There were also others which anyone could use. This particular oath (the two goddesses are Demeter and Persephone) is characteristic of women. At line 160 the Second Woman substitutes another oath, 'By Apollo', which is somewhat stronger. However, even this does not belong exclusively to men and Praxagora herself uses it at line 631.

PRAXAGORA	By the two goddesses? You fool! Have you lost your wits?	
SECOND WOMAN	What's the matter? I didn't ask you for a drink.	
PRAXAGORA	No but you swore like a woman. You were perfectly all right otherwise.	
SECOND WOMAN	'By Apollo' — is that right?	
PRAXAGORA	All right. Stop. I won't take another step in this Assembly business unless you get these details perfectly accurate.	160
SECOND WOMAN	Give me the garland. I'll have another go. I think I've got the right idea now. 'In my opinion we women are gathered here . . .'	165
PRAXAGORA	Again! Do you call men women! <i>The Second Woman points accusingly towards the audience.</i>	
SECOND WOMAN	It's Epigonos who's to blame. He caught my eye out there and I thought I was giving a speech to women.	
PRAXAGORA	Clear off and go and sit down. <i>The Second Woman goes back to her seat as Praxagora takes the garland and prepares to begin a speech.</i>	
	I think I'll take this garland and speak myself on your behalf. I pray to god that I can bring our plans to a favourable conclusion. 'I have a share of this land of ours just as you do. And I am disgusted and distressed by the state of our city.	170
	I see our city all the time employing bad leaders. And, if one of them so happens to do a good day's work, he will follow it up with ten bad ones. You give the job to someone else — and he'll do even worse.	
	It's hard to give advice to men who are difficult to please when you're afraid of those who wish to be your friends and always wooing those who don't.	175
	There was a time when we never used to come to these Assemblies. But we did realize that Agyrrhios was a rogue. Yet now we come here and those of us who get paid go overboard in praising him	180
		185

Notes

Line 167 Epigonos is not known to us as an historical figure. He was possibly effeminate in appearance so that the Second Woman can mistake the audience for women when she sees him.

Line 185 See notes on lines 102 and 284.

	while those of us who don't say that men who seek to put their vote up for sale in the Assembly ought to be put to death.'	
FIRST WOMAN	By Aphrodite — what a marvellous speech.	
PRAXAGORA	'By Aphrodite'. That's a woman's oath you fool. A right mess of it you'd make if you said that in the Assembly.	190
FIRST WOMAN	But I won't.	
PRAXAGORA	Don't make it a habit then. 'Take this current alliance. When we considered it, everyone said that the city was ruined if it didn't come off. But when finally it did come off, they were angry about it and the speaker who pushed it through had to cut and run. We have to launch ships: the poor man votes in favour but not the rich man and the farmers. You happen to hate Korinthians and the feeling is mutual. Next they are friendly — you be friendly to them too. The Argives are mad while Hieronymos is wise. There was a chance of safety — but Thrasyboulos himself is angry since he hasn't been called in to help.'	195 200
FIRST WOMAN	What a sensible man!	
PRAXAGORA	That's the right way to praise me. 'You, the Athenian people, are to blame for this. You draw your money from the public funds but each looks to his own personal gain and the state stumbles along like Aisimos. So, if you trust me, you may still be saved. I move that we should hand over the state to the women. We already employ them to look after the activities and finances of our households.'	205 210
FIRST WOMAN	Hurray! Hurray!	
SECOND WOMAN	Go on. Go on. Good man!	
PRAXAGORA	'I will show you how they are better in what they do than us. Firstly, everyone of them dyes her wool	215

Notes

Line 189 See note on line 155.

Line 193 It is the references in the next few lines which date the performance of the play. We do not know who 'the speaker' is (l.196). 'This current alliance' is the Anti-Spartan League arranged in 395 between Athens, Thebes and Locris. Thus the play must have been produced after, but perhaps only shortly after, 395. The reference to hating Korinthians (l.199) is not clear. Korinth and Argos had also quickly joined the alliance but in the following year the allies met with considerable reverses. We may assume that each saw reason to blame the others. Hieronymos (l.201) is probably Konon's admiral who was active in the first decade of the fourth century. Thrasyboulos (l.202) has come down to us in history as the hero who delivered Athens from the thirty tyrants. In the first decade of the fourth century he was a moderate, but we cannot specifically tie him in with the 'chance of safety' (l.202). After the victory at Knidos in the late summer of 394 there was presumably an opportunity for making an honourable peace. We do not know what Thrasyboulos' actions were at this time. However, if this victory is what Aristophanes refers to as 'a chance of safety', we might presume that the play was produced quite soon after this event. The Lenaea or the Great Dionysia in the first few months of 393 would provide a suitable opportunity for such references.

Line 204 Praxagora refers here to the fact that the First Woman has got it right and called her a sensible *man*.

Line 208 We know of a man by the name of Aisimos who, like Thrasyboulos, opposed the war with Sparta. Even if he is the man referred to here, we do not know whether the reference is to a physical disability or to the fact that, in Aristophanes' view, he had changed his opinion.

	with boiling water in the good old way; and you won't see them introducing any novel notions. The city of Athens would surely have been saved if this was the case and she had not busied herself with every new idea.	220
	Women sit down to roast their barley in the traditional way. They carry things on their heads in the traditional way. They keep the festival of Demeter in the traditional way. They bake cakes in the traditional way. They wear their husbands out in the traditional way. They take lovers in their homes in the traditional way.	225
	They buy little extras in the traditional way. They love unwatered wine in the traditional way. They like being bedded in the traditional way. Gentlemen, let us hand the state over to them. Let's not waste time in chattering or enquiring what they intend to do. Let's just simply allow them to govern, sure in the knowledge that as mothers their principal desire will be to spare our soldiers. Also who would send extra provisions quicker than the mothers?	230 235
	A woman is far the best at raising money. When put in charge she will never be cheated since women are themselves practised cheats. I won't bother with the other points. If you give me your support, you'll pass your lives in happiness.'	240
FIRST WOMAN	Hurray! My dearest Praxagora, well done, Where did you learn to speak so well?	
PRAXAGORA	I lived with my husband on the Pnyx amongst the refugees. I listened to the orators there and learned them off by heart.	
FIRST WOMAN	There's no wonder, then, that you were so clever. We women will elect you as our commander on the spot if you can bring these plans off. But if you have the bad luck to be attacked by Kephalos,	245

Notes

- Line 221** It is rather ironic that Praxagora lays stress on traditional ways when putting her case since the case itself, for government by women, is the complete opposite of tradition. Moreover, when the women do take over, we find that what they do is anything but traditional!
- Line 243** It is not possible to date this reference to refugees with any accuracy. Praxogora might be referring to any time between 413 and 405.
- Line 248** Kephalos was a distinguished orator and a member of the pro-war faction. He was also a potter. After the serious business of rehearsal and the congratulations, Aristophanes inserts some twenty lines of pure comedy bringing in references to current politicians and continuing the coarser type of jokes about the problems which the chorus face as women.

	how will you answer him in the Assembly?	
PRAXAGORA	I will say he's mad.	
FIRST WOMAN	But everyone knows that.	250
PRAXAGORA	Well I'll say he's a manic depressive.	
FIRST WOMAN	They know that too.	
PRAXAGORA	Well I'll say he is a lousy tinker with pots but a fine tinkerer with the city.	
SECOND WOMAN	But what if squint-eyed Neokleides attacks you?	
PRAXAGORA	I'll tell him to look up a dog's arse.	255
SECOND WOMAN	But what if they start knocking you?	
PRAXAGORA	I'm game. It's not as if I don't know anything about knocking.	
FIRST WOMAN	Only one danger left. What if the police drag you off? What will you do then?	
PRAXAGORA	I'll stick my elbows out like this. <i>Praxagora takes up a wrestler's stance.</i>	
	I'll never let them get their hands round my waist.	260
CHORUS LEADER	And if they lift you up, we'll tell them to leave you alone.	
FIRST WOMAN	This a marvellous plan we've got. But we haven't given our minds to how we'll remember to raise our arms to vote. We're more accustomed to raising our legs!	265
PRAXAGORA	It's not easy. We'll have to vote with our right arms and bare them to the shoulder. Come on. Hitch up your tunics. Put your shoes on as fast as you can just as you've seen your husbands do when they're about to go to the Assembly or when they leave the house. Then, when you've got all that right, just put your beards on. And, when you've got those on, and adjusted nicely, throw these men's cloaks round you, the ones you stole. Then lean on your walking-sticks and off you go singing a song — some old song — trying to sound like a bunch of rustics.	270 275

Notes

Line 254 Neokleides is not known to us in history.

Line 255 This phrase is not otherwise known to us and we can only make conjectures as to its origin and meaning. We might presume it was a popular offensive response designed to ward someone off and perhaps parallel to 'bugger off' in English.

Line 258 See note on line 143.

FIRST WOMAN [To Praxagora and the Second Woman.] Let's go on ahead of them. There will be other women too, I think, coming in from the countryside straight to the Pnyx.

280

PRAXAGORA Well hurry up. It's one of the rules of the Assembly that if you're not present at dawn you have to slip back home without a penny.

Praxagora and the two women depart by the right-hand side towards the city leaving the chorus to complete their preparations. The chorus breaks up into two distinct sections perhaps one representing the city women and one the women from the countryside.

CHORUS LEADER Gentlemen, it's time to get on our way. And we must remember always to say 'gentlemen' and take care never to slip up. There's terrible danger if we get caught when we've secretly taken on such a daring scheme.

285

CITY WOMEN Gentlemen, let's get on our way to the Assembly. The magistrate has threatened that unless you arrive full of dust with only a whiff of garlic for breakfast bright and early in the morning and solemn-faced, you won't get paid your three obols. Now Charitimides, Smikythos and Drakes follow me and hurry. Watch you don't strike a wrong note in the show you've got to put on. When we've got our tickets we'll sit together so that we can vote together on whatever our sisters . . . What did I say? I must call them brothers.

290

295

The first part of the chorus begins to move off to the right to the city.

RUSTIC WOMEN Let's bundle that lot from the town out of the way. Why! in the past when you only got one obol for going they sat gossiping in the garland shops. But now — they make themselves a nuisance — there's too many. Yet when good old Myronides was in charge, no one would have dared to run the city's business and take money for it. Everyone used to come with a drink in a little wineskin and some bread as well, a couple of onions and three olives. But now they're set on getting their three obols whenever they do some public service —

300

305

Notes

Line 284 At this point Praxagora and the two principal actors depart leaving the chorus to complete their preparations and follow. The first four lines (ll. 285–8) were probably spoken by the Chorus Leader and for these lines the metre changes with a slight lengthening of the line. Thereafter the chorus splits into two groups. The first group (ll. 289–99) take up the exhortation of the Chorus Leader and lay stress upon the requirement to act as men. They also make play on the payment for attending the assembly. Initially no payment had been made for attending the assembly but first a payment of one obol was introduced by Agyrrhios (see note on l. 102), and then, because this did not prove sufficient incentive for attendance, Agyrrhios raised it to three obols which proved very popular. This aspect is the major theme of the second group (ll. 300–10) who take on the guise of country folk holding the 'townies' in contempt. The two groups each sing a choral song, each song being divided into five verses with much shorter lines.

Line 304 Myronides is a stock symbol in Aristophanes of the Golden Age of Athens. Probably he was best known for his victory over the Boeotians at Oinophyta in 456.

The rustic women move off to the right.

Praxagora's husband, Blepyros, enters from the house. Since his wife has taken his own clothes, he is dressed in his wife's clothes.

BLEPYROS What's the matter? Where's my wife gone off to?
It's nearly dawn and she's nowhere in sight.
I've been lying in bed wanting a crap for ages
and trying to find my shoes and my cloak
in the dark. I kept groping around
and I couldn't find it but the crap kept on
hammering away at my back door. So I took
this little wrap of my wife's
and yanked on her Persian slippers.

315

He looks around.

Where's a good spot for letting go?
I suppose anywhere is all right in the dark.
Nobody will see me letting go here.
What a fool I am. Fancy getting married
at my age. I ought to be flogged.
She's up to no good going out.
Never mind. I can't wait.

320

325

As he looks around, he sees a man coming out of the door of the house.

MAN Who's this? Isn't it my neighbour, Blepyros?

BLEPYROS God yes! The very man.

MAN Tell me,
What's all this yellow stuff? Surely Kinesias
hasn't been dropping his load here?

330

BLEPYROS No. I put on this yellow wrap, which my wife
wears, to come out of the house.

MAN Where's your own cloak?

BLEPYROS I've no idea.
I looked for it amongst the bed clothes but couldn't find it.

Notes

- Line 310** 'Builders' labourers' were considered to be the lowest category of citizens. They were not slaves but there seems to have been a traditional distaste amongst Athenians for working for somebody else.
- Line 311** Blepyros comes out of the house and there commences a scatological scene of high comedy. Before he says a word the audience would be laughing at the strange clothes he is wearing. We might presume that he hobbled out in tight slippers and the wrap he wears, his wife's, is probably a very poor fit and possibly accentuates his phallic costume.
- Line 320** The majority of Athenian houses did not have a toilet. Thus Blepyros is faced with going to the nearest public convenience or, since he thinks nobody can see him in the dark, using the street. We might presume that normally a chamber pot was used.
- Line 327** Blepyros is just finding himself a good spot when his neighbour appears from the door. The neighbour is not referred to by name but we may reasonably assume that he is the Second Woman's husband.
- Line 329** Blepyros is wearing a woman's yellow undergarment — his wife's — the equivalent of a chiton. The Greek word for yellow is also, in comedy, a term for excrement and thus, owing to Blepyros' condition, there is a double meaning for the word. Kinesias had been a butt for Aristophanes' humour before and in *Frogs* he is said to have defiled a shrine of Hekate.
- Line 334** Cloaks were used as blankets. Thus Praxagora has not only taken Blepyros' cloak but also part of his bedclothes.

MAN	Didn't you ask your wife to find it?	335
BLEPYROS	I didn't, by Zeus, because she wasn't there. She's slipped out of the house without my knowing. I'm afraid that she's up to some no good scheme.	
MAN	By Poseidon — you're in exactly the same boat as I am. My wife has gone as well; and she's taken the cloak I wear. And that's not the worst of it — she's taken my shoes too. At any rate I couldn't find them anywhere.	340
BLEPYROS	By Dionysos — I couldn't find my shoes either. But since I wanted a crap I forced my feet into her slippers, so that I wouldn't let go all over the blanket — it was a clean one you see.	345
MAN	What can the matter be? Has one of her girl friends asked her round to breakfast?	
BLEPYROS	I suppose so. She isn't a bad woman as far as I know. <i>The man looks carefully at Blepyros.</i>	350
MAN	You must be letting go quite a string. Well It's time for me to go to the Assembly — that is — when I've found my cloak. It's the only one I've got.	
BLEPYROS	So must I — when I've finished. Now some pear has got my guts blocked up.	355
MAN	Like Thrasyboulos said in his speech against the Spartans, eh? <i>He goes back to the house to look for his clothes.</i>	
BLEPYROS	By Dionysos — I'm 'blockaded' all right. What shall I do? This is bad enough but when I have something to eat where will the shit go after that? He's put a plug in my back door this pear fellow has, whoever he is.	360

Notes

- Line 356** An ancient commentator on this line suggests that Thrasyboulos once promised the Spartans to speak on their behalf but changed his mind and excused himself on the grounds that he had become ill through eating pears. Such an explanation seems rather too contrived. I assume that Aristophanes intended a pun on 'blocked up' by referring to a suggestion by Thrasyboulos for a 'blockade'.

He addresses the audience.

Will someone go and get me a doctor? Who though?
Which of the anal-ists will it be to treat this?
Does Amynon know? Perhaps he won't admit it. 365
Will someone call Antisthenes, his knowledge is encyclopaedic?
Judging from his groaning he knows
what's best for an arse in need of a crap.
Goddess of childbirth — don't leave me
in full labour but plugged up. 370
Don't let me become the chamber pot of comedy.

Chremes enters from the right on his way back from the Assembly.

CHREMES You there, what are you doing? Relieving yourself?

BLEPYROS Me?
Certainly not, by Zeus. On the contrary, I've stood up.

CHREMES You've got your wife's wrap on you?

BLEPYROS I just happened to pick it up in the dark. 375
But tell me, where have you come from?

CHREMES From the Assembly.

BLEPYROS Is it finished already?

CHREMES Yes, it finished early.
By Zeus — it was ridiculous!
The way they rounded up the quorum.

BLEPYROS Did you get your three obols?

CHREMES I wish I had. 380
I got there late I'm ashamed to say.
By Zeus — I've got nothing but an empty purse!

BLEPYROS But why were you late?

CHREMES A great crowd of people —
you never saw such — came in a body to the Pnyx.
In fact, when we saw them, we thought they were like 385
shoemakers. Really it's amazing the number
of pale faces there was to see at the Assembly.
So I didn't get paid — and lots of others too.

BLEPYROS I suppose I wouldn't get paid if I went now?

CHREMES No chance.

Notes

Line 365 Blepyros has engaged the audience in his plight. Presumably Amynon was a well-known homosexual but he is not otherwise known to us. We might assume the same for Antisthenes in the next line.

Line 372 The scatological interlude between Blepyros and his neighbour has served two purposes. First, it has given Aristophanes the opportunity of introducing some good jokes and gaining some rapport with his audience. Secondly, it has served a purely dramatic purpose in denoting to some extent the passage of time, although a convention of this sort was not of such great importance to the Greek audience as it is to the modern audience.

Line 386 The shoemaker worked indoors and so, like the women, was not exposed to the sun (see note on l.62). The pale face of the cobbler was proverbial amongst both Greeks and Romans.

	Not even if you got there when the cock crowed for the second time.	390
BLEPYROS	I've had it. Antilochos, weep for me, the living, rather than the three obols. I'm done for. But what was it that brought such a crowd together so early?	
CHREMES	What else but the fact that the presiding officers decided to enter the subject of the city's security on the order paper? At once squint-eyed Neokleides crept forward to speak first and then the people shouted out loud — as you'd expect: 'What a scandal that this fellow should dare to address us particularly when the topic for discussion is security. He couldn't even keep his own eyesight secure.' But he looked round and shouted out: 'What can I do about it?'	395 400
BLEPYROS	'Pound up garlic with the juice from a fig tree. Mix in some spurge — the Spartan sort — And smear it on your eyelids every night.' That's what I'd have told him if I'd been there.	405
CHREMES	After him that clever fellow Euaion came forward, naked — as most of us thought — but he claimed that he did have his cloak on. Then he made a most popular speech: 'You see that I'm in need of a few pounds for a cloak for my own security. Still I'll tell you about the security of the city and its citizens. If the gents' outfitters give everyone who needs it a cloak in the middle of winter, then no-one will get pleurisy. And those who have got no beds or bed clothes should go after they've washed to the tanners to sleep. And if they close the door on them when it's winter, they should be fined three blankets.'	410 415 420
BLEPYROS	By Dionysos — a damn good idea. And no-one would have voted against him if he'd added: 'The corn dealers should give three measures of corn to the needy or be damned,	425

Notes

- Line 391** Aristophanes here parodies the grief of Achilles for his dead comrade, Patroklos. In Aeschylos' play *Myrmidones* there were the following words 'Weep Antilochos for me, the living, rather than for the dead (Patroklos)'. Antilochos brought the bad news to Achilles of his comrade's death; here Chremes brings the bad news — no pay! (The story originally came from the *Iliad*, 18).
- Line 404** Praxagora had not been particularly polite on the subject of Neokleides (see 1.255). It would seem that her husband's remedy, composed of pungent herbs, was far more likely to irritate than cure the condition. There is a complete reversal in these responses to what might have been expected. The response from Blepyros is more akin to what we might expect from a woman whereas that from Praxagora had been almost equivalent to a man's oath.
- Line 408** Of Euaion we know nothing. It seems that his cloak was so full of holes that to all intents and purposes it was non-existent.

	so that they can get some benefit from Nausikydes.'	
CHREMES	Then after this, a pretty youth, a bit pale, like Nikias, sprang to his feet to speak and tried to say that we should hand the city over to the womenfolk. Then that mob of shoemakers yelled and cried out 'Well said' but the lot from the country rumbled their dissent.	430
BLEPYROS	By Zeus — they had some sense.	
CHREMES	But they were in the minority and the young man drowned them out, saying plenty that was good about women and plenty that was bad about you.	435
BLEPYROS	What did he say?	
CHREMES	First he said you were a crook.	
BLEPYROS	And what about you?	
CHREMES	Don't interrupt — and a thief.	
BLEPYROS	Only me?	
CHREMES	And in addition, by Zeus, an informer.	
BLEPYROS	Only me?	
CHREMES	[<i>He points to the audience.</i>] And all these folk here, by Zeus.	
BLEPYROS	Well who's denying that?	440
CHREMES	He said that a woman is full of intelligence and businesslike. She never betrays the secrets of the Thesmophoria, her sacred festival, as you and I are always doing with state secrets.	
BLEPYROS	By Hermes — that's no lie.	445
CHREMES	Then he said that women lend each other clothes, jewellery, money and drinking-cups by mutual agreement without witnesses. And they give them all back again — they don't cheat, like he said most of us do.	450

Notes

- Line 426** Nausikydes we know made a fortune from his dealings in grain from the food crisis in war-torn Athens. Blepyros sees that the Athenians could get some benefit back from him -- either he'd give them free corn or they would no longer have to suffer his presence.
- Line 428** It is not Nikias the famous general of the Peloponnesian War who is referred to here but perhaps his grandson. Praxagora is much younger than her husband (1.323) and she has apparently passed off well as a somewhat effeminate pale-skinned young man. In general, Athenian women married before the age of twenty and men not until their late twenties. In comedy we often find a considerable discrepancy between the ages. The young woman married to a much older man is a common combination and the source of much comic activity. This is particularly the case in New Comedy where it often forms an integral part of the plot.
- Line 445** There is a certain incongruity in swearing by Hermes that you are not telling a lie. Hermes was almost the 'patron saint' of liars and showed his cunning from the first day of his life when, according to legend, he invented the lyre and stole Apollo's cattle but impudently denied that he was the thief.

BLEPYROS	By Poseidon — we do, even if there are witnesses.	
CHREMES	He said plenty more in praise of women — they don't act as informers or prosecute or try to put down the democracy. On the contrary, they do a lot of good.	
BLEPYROS	But what was decided?	
CHREMES	To entrust the city to them. It seemed that this was the only reform in the city we'd not yet tried.	455
BLEPYROS	Is it passed?	
CHREMES	Yes, I tell you.	
BLEPYROS	Do we have to hand over to them all our citizen's duties?	
CHREMES	That's right.	
BLEPYROS	Then I won't be a juror but my wife will?	460
CHREMES	You won't still support your family — your wife will.	
BLEPYROS	And I won't be grumbling when it's dawn any more?	
CHREMES	No by Zeus — that's now your wife's business. You don't have to grumble. You can stay at home farting away.	
BLEPYROS	But it would be terrible for us old men if, when they take the reins of the state, the women force us to . . .	465
CHREMES	To what?	
BLEPYROS	Make love.	
CHREMES	And if we're not up to it?	
BLEPYROS	They won't give us breakfast.	
CHREMES	By Zeus — you'll have to find a way of making love and having your breakfast at the same time.	470
BLEPYROS	But to be forced. It's terrible.	
CHREMES	If this will help the city, its our duty as men.	
BLEPYROS	It's true there's a saying among our elders 'The stupid and idiotic things we plan to do all turn out for the best for us.'	475

Notes

Line 462 Blepyros' comment follows on from his previous reference to his jury service and he does not take up Chremes' comment concerning the end of his obligations to support his family. He is primarily concerned with the fact that he will not have to get up so early in the morning any longer to carry out his duties as a juror. There is perhaps some irony in the fact that his propensity for staying in bed late has allowed Praxagora to accomplish her scheme.

Line 471 It would not escape the attention of the audience that many married women are forced to make love when they did not wish to. Now the boot is on the other foot, Blepyros objects to such a requirement on him. Closely connected with this in terms of the comic element is, of course, the fact that, as far as being forced to make love is concerned, there is a very definite biological difference between male and female. Blepyros, as an old man, might in any case be not so capable of making love!

CHREMES O lady Athene and you gods I pray that this may be.
I'm off. Good luck.

Chremes makes his departure by the exit to the house.

BLEPYROS And you too, Chremes.

Blepyros departs inside the house.

The chorus leader enters at the head of the chorus, returning to the stage by the right-hand entrance from the city.

CHORUS LEADER Forward march.

Is there any man following us?

Turn round and look.

Guard yourselves carefully — there are many rogues —
in case perhaps there's somebody watching us from the rear.

480

CHORUS Be sure to clump your feet as much as possible when you walk.
If what we've done comes to light it will bring us all
into disgrace with our husbands.

485

So wrap your cloak tightly round you and keep looking round
in close formation there and to the right
so that our plot may succeed.

But hurry. We're already near to the spot
from which we set out to go to the Assembly.

490

You can see the house of our leader
who thought up the scheme the citizens have just voted for.

We ought not to waste a moment before
ripping our beards off in case

someone actually sees us and denounces us.

495

Come here and move into the shadows
by the side of the wall.

And keep an eye out.

Change yourselves back into what you were.

Don't waste time. There we see our leader
coming from the Assembly.

500

They look to the right.

Hurry. Everyone hates hairy beards on their chins.

They'll be pleased to appear again in their rightful form.

Praxagora enters from the right wearing her disguise.

PRAXAGORA Ladies, these plans we made
have turned out successfully.

505

But quickly, before anyone sees,
off with your cloaks. Get out of your shoes.

Notes

Line 477 The two men go off. If they have seen some disadvantages in handing over the state to women, they have not begun to imagine the changes Praxagora herself will outline.

Line 478 The chorus re-enter having successfully completed their mission. The Chorus Leader is the speaker and the metre is that used at 1.285 but interspersed with shorter lines.

Line 487 'There' probably refers to the audience, and 'the right' refers to the exit leading to the Pnyx by which they have entered. The men in the audience and in the assembly alike are seen as potential threats.

'Untie the knotted Spartan reins'.

Drop your walking sticks. [*She turns to address the chorus leader*]. You dear, get these women sorted out. I want to creep inside
sorted out. I want to creep inside
before my husband sees me
and put his cloak back again
where I found it and the other things I took.

510

CHORUS LEADER We have done all you asked. You must tell us what else to do.
Whatever you think is best we will be glad to obey.
I know that I have never met a cleverer woman than you.

515

PRAXAGORA Stay around so that I can use you all as advisers
in the office to which I have been elected.
You've certainly been very manly in the crush and danger back there.
Blepyros enters from the house just as Praxagora is about to enter to return the clothes.

BLEPYROS Well if it's not Praxagora. Where have you been?

PRAXAGORA What business
is it of yours?

520

BLEPYROS What business is it of mine? That's cool!

PRAXAGORA You're surely not saying I'm just back from a lover.

BLEPYROS Maybe not just one.

PRAXAGORA Well you can certainly test that.

BLEPYROS How?

PRAXAGORA If my face smells of perfume.

BLEPYROS What do you mean? Can't a woman have it off without perfume?

525

PRAXAGORA I can't, more's the pity.

BLEPYROS Why did you go off
at dawn without a word and take my cloak with you?

PRAXAGORA A woman who is a dear friend of mine was in labour
and sent for me during the night.

BLEPYROS Couldn't you have told me
in that case?

PRAXAGORA What! Shouldn't I consider
the new mother?

530

Notes

Line 508 The language of Praxagora's return is a parody of the sort of entrance found in tragedy. The line is almost certainly a quotation. What the 'Spartan reins', referred to in the tragedy, are we do not know — here at least they are shoe laces.

Line 517 Election is something of a euphemism since there has not been one. The chorus have merely designated Praxagora as their leader (see l.491).

Line 519 The presence of the chorus has no particular dramatic significance. They are little more than a mechanical contrivance to accompany Praxagora's entrance. Their continued presence might appear to offer encouragement to Praxagora and, conversely, discouragement to Blepyros but they can hardly be said to offer advice.

BLEPYROS	Yes, after you've told me. There's something fishy going on here.	
PRAXAGORA	By the two goddesses — I went off just as I was. The woman who came for me begged me to set off as quickly as I could.	
BLEPYROS	In that case, shouldn't you have put your own cloak on? But no! — you stripped me of mine and put your own wrap on me and went off leaving me like a corpse, laid out. The only thing you didn't do was put a garland on me and an oil flask beside me.	535
PRAXAGORA	I was cold and I'm delicate and fragile so I put this cloak of yours on to keep me warm. I left you lying amongst warm bed clothes, dear husband.	540
BLEPYROS	What about my shoes and my walking stick — why did they go with you?	
PRAXAGORA	I put on your shoes to protect your cloak and pretended to be you, clumping along with both feet and banging the cobble stones with your walking stick.	545
BLEPYROS	You've lost us eight quarts of wheat you know which I could have got the money for from attending the Assembly.	
PRAXAGORA	Never mind. She's got a little boy.	
BLEPYROS	Who has? The Assembly?	
PRAXAGORA	No, by Zeus — the woman I went to help. Did it meet?	550
BLEPYROS	Yes, by Zeus — don't you remember? I told you yesterday.	
PRAXAGORA	Ah, now I remember.	
BLEPYROS	Don't you know its decisions?	
PRAXAGORA	By Zeus — of course I don't.	
BLEPYROS	Sit down then and chew your cuttlefish. They've decided to hand over the state to you.	555
PRAXAGORA	What for? To weave?	
BLEPYROS	No. To govern.	
PRAXAGORA	Govern what?	

Notes

- Line 537** It was customary to lay out the dead on a bed or bier. The body was clothed in white and crowned with a garland. Oil flasks were set beside it. Blepyros is exaggerating greatly and there is some inconsistency in the detail. The word which I have translated as 'wrap' is in fact a woman's outer garment and not the same as that mentioned at ll.318 and 332, which is a more intimate, short, yellow garment. Such inconsistencies in comedy are not uncommon. In the scatological scene there is some play on the colour of the garment — hence the reference.
- Line 544** Praxagora's excuse is that she thought it best to dress up completely as a man so that thieves would not realise she was a woman and steal the cloak from her.
- Line 554** 'Chew your cuttlefish' is clearly a proverb but the meaning is not a little obscure. Suggestions by editors have been various and ingenious. I favour 'sit down and concentrate' which would fit the flow of speech on the assumption that Blepyros is imagining that he is about to break some amazing news to a scatter-brained woman who can't even remember yesterday's instructions.

BLEPYROS	Absolutely everything connected with the state.	
PRAXAGORA	By Aphrodite — the city will be lucky from now on.	
BLEPYROS	Why?	
PRAXAGORA	For many reasons. No longer for the future will it be possible for villains to cause the city shame, no more offering evidence, no more informing.	560
BLEPYROS	My god! Don't do that! Don't take away my means of living. <i>Chremes enters from the house, overhearing the last part of the conversation.</i>	
CHREMES	My good fellow, let the woman speak.	
PRAXAGORA	There'll be no thefts; no envying our neighbours; no one will be in tatters or poor any more; there'll be no brawling; no pursuit of debtors.	565
CHREMES	Splendid, by Poseidon — if she speaks the truth.	
PRAXAGORA	I'll explain it so that you [<i>she turns to Chremes</i>] will support me and he [<i>she turns to Blepyros</i>] won't say anything against me.	570
CHORUS LEADER	Now you must waken your shrewd mind and philosophic intellect that knows how to protect your friends. The inventiveness of your tongue for our common good fortune will gladden the city's people with countless advantages to life. It's time to show us what you can do. Our city needs some wise experiment. Just take care that it has never yet been done or mentioned before. They don't like seeing the same thing over and over again. Don't waste time. Let's have your great thoughts. Speed finds favour amongst the audience.	575 580
PRAXAGORA	Well I believe I have a really excellent scheme. As for the audience — I'm terribly afraid that they might not want me to make innovation but prefer me to spend my time on old accustomed themes.	585
BLEPYROS	Don't be afraid about innovation. Doing something new and abandoning the old rules is preferable to any sort of imperialism.	

Notes

- Line 564** The manuscripts give no guidance as to the speaker of these words. Clearly it is not Blepyros or Praxagora. Most editors believe that it is Chremes. He gives no motivation for his arrival. The fact that he does not recognise Praxagora as the pale youth (l.427) should not be seen as an inconsistency. Praxagora was no longer wearing her beard and, whether or not she is still carrying Blepyros' clothes or wearing them, she is not attempting to act like a man.
- Line 571** The chorus has been standing silent in attendance as requested (l.517). Moreover, as women we might expect them to remain in the background. However, the tables have been turned and now, under the new legislation, they can speak as the superiors.
- Line 581** Praxagora is being encouraged to put forward her plans. Here the drama merges with reality and the references to the city and its people, though strictly belonging to the drama, are interchangeable with Athens of the time and the audience of the play. Such an audience is tired of seeing the same old plots and the some old ideas. Praxagora is about to present to the *dramatis personae*, and Aristophanes is about to present to his audience something quite original.

Praxagora addresses the audience.

- PRAXAGORA Don't any of you object or interrupt
before you've learnt my scheme and heard my argument.
My intention is that all must share and hold everything in common, 590
all must be equal — not one man rich and another poor,
not one man with acres of land and another with not enough to be
buried in,
not one man with many slaves and another without a single attendant.
There will be one way of life for all alike.
- BLEPYROS How will this one way of life for all come about?
- PRAXAGORA Too fast — you'd
even try to eat shit before me. 595
- BLEPYROS Will shit too be held in common?
- PRAXAGORA By Zeus — you've interrupted too soon.
This is what I intended to say. First I'll make land
and money and whatever else anyone has common property.
Then from this common property we'll feed you,
giving out provisions or holding them back, attending to needs. 600
- CHREMES What about the man who doesn't have any land but has silver
and gold, unknown wealth?
- PRAXAGORA He must place it in the pool.
If he doesn't he'll perjure himself.
- BLEPYROS He probably got it by perjury in the
first place.
- PRAXAGORA Well, it won't be any use to him at all.
- CHREMES How's that?
- PRAXAGORA No one will commit a crime just because he's poor since everyone will
own everything — 605
bread, fish, barley cake, clothes, wine, garlands, chickpeas.
What advantage will there be in not putting in to the pool? If you can find
one, tell me.
- CHREMES Won't those who already have possessions still steal more?
-

Notes

- Line 587** The Greek words which I have translated as 'old rules' and 'imperialism' are almost identical. It is not possible without undue circumlocution precisely to bring out this play on words in English. The notion of empire was still fresh in the Athenian mind. Even after the dissolution of the Delian league the Athenians did not abandon their ambitions in this direction.
- Line 588** The idea of handing over the management of the state to women had been unusual. It could be defended on the grounds that women were good at household management and would therefore be good at managing the state which was really nothing more than all the households put together. Praxagora has stressed the traditional activities of women as a good thing and a solid base for dependency on the part of the state (ll.214 ff.). Now, however, she has pleaded an opposite course — that tradition is bad and that innovation is what is needed. Her two major innovative themes are the community of property (ll.590 ff.) and the community of women and children (ll.613 ff., see also pp. 28–9).
- Line 595** Praxagora accuses Blepyros of always wanting to be first. She had been just about to explain. Her reply is couched in a rather coarse proverb but Blepyros is too stupid to understand, and in his next question takes the proverb in its literal meaning.

PRAXAGORA	That's in the past, my friend, when we had the old laws. Now that the necessities of life will be common to all what advantage is there in not putting in to the pool?	610
BLEPYROS	Suppose someone sees a girl and takes a fancy and wants a bit. He'll be able to dip into his pocket to give her something, sleep with her and have all the 'community' he wants.	
PRAXAGORA	But he'll be able to sleep with her free of charge. <i>She gestures to the chorus.</i> I'll make these women common to all men for any one who wants to take them to bed and father children.	
BLEPYROS	But won't everyone go after the most beautiful and want to give her a bit of stick?	615
PRAXAGORA	The plainer girls and the snub-nosed will sit beside the classy ones and if its the latter you're after you'll have to knock off the ugly one first.	
BLEPYROS	What about us old men? If we've got to have the ugly ones our cocks will be drooping before we get to the good lookers.	620
PRAXAGORA	They won't fight over you. Cheer up. Don't worry, they won't.	
BLEPYROS	Over what?	
PRAXAGORA	Over not sleeping with you. You're not up to it.	
BLEPYROS	The female side of the proposal makes some sort of sense since you've contrived that no-one's hole will be empty. But what about the men? They'll avoid the ugly men and go for the handsome.	625
PRAXAGORA	The plainer men will keep an eye on the more handsome as they leave dinner and keep watch on the public buildings. The women won't be able to sleep with the handsome giants until they've granted their favours to the ugly dwarfs.	
BLEPYROS	Will Lysikrates' nose hold itself as high as a handsome man's?	630

Notes

Line 611 Blepyros, no longer in the flush of youth as we have seen, sees a particular advantage in having one's own money, namely to buy a young girl's favours. This provides an opening for Praxagora's theme of the community of women and children. Here we have an example of good dramatic technique. What Blepyros has said is completely in keeping with his character as depicted so far in the play. It appears to the audience quite natural that he should be concerned to protect his interest in young girls and Aristophanes is able in this way to introduce quite naturally his new theme which arises out of Blepyros' comment.

Line 617 Praxagora apparently has an answer to everything and her solution prepares the audience for the scenes to follow when these regulations will be put into practice with much coarse humour. Many critics of this particular play of Aristophanes have seen the scenes between the Young Girl, the Old Women and the Young Man as an unnatural addition, divorced from the play in that they are not an essential part of the action and distinct in their crudity and knock-about style. I prefer to believe that these later scenes are an important and integral part of the play both in terms of the theme of communism and in terms of the presentation of the comedy as a whole. It is surely not a coincidence that we have a practical exposition of this theory towards the end of the play where a theme so rich in comic possibilities is exploited to the full by the dramatist.

Line 630 We may assume that Lysikrates was a short man with a snub nose. He also dyed his hair as we later learn (1.736).

PRAXAGORA	Yes by Apollo — and my plan is democratic and a great laugh on the dandies with their signet rings since the ordinary man will get first say, ‘Stand back — wait until I’ve finished then I’ll let you have a go’.	
CHREMES	But how will each of us be able to recognize his own children if we live like this?	635
PRAXAGORA	Does it matter? They’ll consider all the old men of the proper generation their fathers.	
BLEPYROS	They’ll just strangle every old man one after the other and make a good job of it since they won’t know the difference. Why, even now when they know who their fathers are they strangle them. So what will happen when they don’t know? In that case they’ll shit on them as well won’t they?	640
PRAXAGORA	The man in the street won’t allow it. In the past they didn’t care about others’ affairs if there was a brawl, but now if they hear a set to they’ll fight off the attackers in case it’s their father being beaten up.	
BLEPYROS	In some respects what you say is all right. But supposing an Epikouros or Leukolophos comes up and calls me ‘Daddy’ — it wouldn’t be nice to hear that.	645
PRAXAGORA	There’s something much worse than that.	
BLEPYROS	What?	
PRAXAGORA	Suppose Aristyllos kissed you and called you ‘father’?	
BLEPYROS	I’d make him shout and scream.	
PRAXAGORA	You’d smell of cat mint though. But he was born before the law was passed so there’s no fear that he’d kiss you.	
BLEPYROS	He’d have paid heavily for it.	650
CHREMES	Who is to farm the land?	
PRAXAGORA	The slaves. It’s your business to go in to dinner nicely dressed when the sun dial casts a ten-foot shadow.	
CHREMES	How will we get a supply of cloaks? I want to know that too.	
PRAXAGORA	The ones you’ve got are quite sufficient, as for replacements — we’ll weave you some.	

Notes

- Line 645** We know nothing of Epikouros or Leukolophos but may surmise that their infamy was common knowledge. The same is true of Aristyllos (l.647), although it would appear from *Wealth* that his coprophilia was quite well-known.
- Line 648** There is a play here on the Greek word for cat-mint since it has the same root as the Greek word for excrement. Presumably Aristyllos’ reputation was such that the audience would seize upon the double meaning.
- Line 649** The theme is here developed to an impossible conclusion merely for the sake of the joke involving the well-known perverts. Praxagora restores the debate to the realms of dramatic possibility by pointing out that the law cannot be made retrospective and hence what Blepyros feared cannot in fact happen.

CHREMES	Just one more question. If someone becomes liable for costs in a law suit, how will he pay them off? It's not right to take them from public funds.	655
PRAXAGORA	To begin with there won't be law suits.	
BLEPYROS	A remark like that will finish you.	
CHREMES	I think so too.	
PRAXAGORA	Why on earth should there be law suits?	
BLEPYROS	For many reasons, by Apollo! Here's one for a start — suppose a debtor refuses to pay.	
PRAXAGORA	But how could the creditor lend money if all funds are public? Obviously he must be a thief.	660
CHREMES	By Demeter, that's a clever answer.	
BLEPYROS	Well tell me this. How will the assailant pay the fine for assault if he gets a skinful and beats someone up? I think you'll have trouble with that.	
PRAXAGORA	He'll lose his daily food. When he loses some of that his stomach will keep him in order and he won't beat anyone up again in a hurry.	665
BLEPYROS	Won't there be thieves any more?	
PRAXAGORA	How can anyone steal what he owns in common?	
BLEPYROS	No more stripping you of your clothes at night?	
PRAXAGORA	Not if you sleep at home — nor if you're out as you've been in the past. Everyone will have enough to live on. If someone does get stripped he just hands his clothes over. What's the need of fighting? He simply goes off to the store and gets another lot of better clothes.	670
BLEPYROS	Won't men still play dice?	
PRAXAGORA	What stakes will they play for?	
BLEPYROS	What sort of society will you make?	
PRAXAGORA	A communal one. I tell you I'll make the city into one household all knocked through into one so that everyone can come and go.	

Notes

- Line 657** Blepyros believes that Praxagora has now gone too far and Chremes agrees. Law suits were almost a hobby for some Athenians and Aristophanes jokes that they will endure almost anything else — community of women, etc. — but not the loss of their right to bring law suits against one another.
- Line 662** Chremes swears by Demeter although normally she is one of the goddesses to whom women appealed (see my note on line 155).
- Line 669** Presumably Praxagora is here having a slight dig at her husband for staying out at night in return for his suspicions of her (Il.520 ff.).

	the good-looking young men with comments like this, 'Hey you! Where are you off? Well you won't get anything that way. It's the snub-nosed and the ugly who get first crack by law. You'll have to get rid of that stiffness by taking your own fig tree in hand in the porch for a while.' Come now, tell me. Does that please you both?	705
BLEPYROS	Very much so.	710
PRAXAGORA	Then I must go off to the market place to receive the goods as they come in with a girl with a shrill voice to act as heraldess. I have to do this since I've been chosen to be in charge and organize the communal meals so that you can have your feast beginning today.	715
BLEPYROS	Will we be having our feast now?	
PRAXAGORA	Yes, of course. Then I want to clamp down on all the prostitutes.	
BLEPYROS	What for?	
PRAXAGORA	It's obvious. [<i>She points to the chrous</i>] So that these ladies can have the pick of our youth. Those dolled-up slave women ought not to be secretly snatching away the love of our free-born men — they should just sleep with slaves and not bother to pluck their pussies. <i>Praxagora departs to the right to the town followed by the chorus.</i>	720
BLEPYROS	Go on, I'll follow close behind so that people will look at me and say 'Oh look! Isn't that our leader's husband?' <i>Blepyros follows his wife.</i>	725
CHREMES	As for me — so as to bring my goods to the market place I'll get my property ready and make an inventory. <i>Chremes goes into the house and returns at once with some slaves.</i>	

Notes

- Line 727** Blepyros is apparently quite happy to be referred to as 'our leader's husband'. He has accepted his inferior position in the new regime perhaps because his wife now has such a lofty position — far more lofty than his own position in society. (See also my note on line 1125.)
- Line 729** Both here and at 1.876 our earliest manuscript has a reference to a choral part (see pp.23ff.). Does this mean that there was a choral part written by Aristophanes which has been lost? Does it mean that Aristophanes left the chorus to improvise with song and dance at this point? In general, scholars have tended not to support the former hypothesis but the latter too has been questioned. Has the reference to a choral part been inserted at a later date to explain away a blank stage? There is certainly very little, if any, lapse of time required at this point, and it is doubtful whether even a modern audience would feel a difficulty in that Chremes can step inside momentarily and return leading his slaves.

CHREMES	Yes.	
MAN	You've had it, you have,	760
	by Zeus the Saviour!	
CHREMES	Why?	
MAN	Why? Plain enough!	
CHREMES	What? Shouldn't I obey the laws?	
MAN	What laws, you idiot?	
CHREMES	Those that have just been passed.	
MAN	Just been passed? What a fool you are.	
CHREMES	A fool?	
MAN	Well, aren't you? The biggest simpleton of them all.	765
CHREMES	Just because I do what's ordered?	
MAN	Should a wise man do what's ordered?	
CHREMES	Indeed he should.	
MAN	You mean a lunatic should.	
CHREMES	Don't you mean to bring your things?	
MAN	I'll watch out until I see what the majority are going to do.	770
CHREMES	What else but prepare to bring their goods along?	
MAN	When I've seen it I'll believe it.	
CHREMES	Well — in the street they're saying . . .	
MAN	Ah yes, they'll <i>say</i> .	
CHREMES	They're talking of bringing along . . .	
MAN	Ah yes, they'll <i>talk</i> .	
CHREMES	You'll be the death of me. You doubt everything . . .	
MAN	Ah yes, they'll <i>doubt</i> .	775
CHREMES	I hope that Zeus destroys you.	
MAN	Ah yes, they'll <i>destroy</i> . Do you think a man with sense will bring his goods?	

Notes

- Line 773** The Man picks up Chremes' remarks and turns them back on him. Chremes, the respectable but not over intelligent citizen, is not quick enough to cope with this verbal repartee and is quickly reduced to frustration.
- Line 777** The Man is typical of the Athenian citizen exemplified by Praxagora earlier (205 ff). He is out for his own ends without a thought for the common good.

	That's not our custom — no by Zeus — we like taking. Even the gods do. You can see from their hands on their statues. When we pray for them to give us their blessings they stand there stretching out their hands palms open — not to give us something but rather to take.	780
CHREMES	My good fellow, let me get on with my work. These goods must be tied together. Where's my straps?	785
MAN	Are you really going to take them?	
CHREMES	Yes, by Zeus. Indeed I am. I'm tying up these tripods.	
MAN	What madness. Fancy not waiting around to see what others are doing and only then . . .	
CHREMES	Do what?	
MAN	Wait a bit longer and then delay again.	790
CHREMES	Why?	
MAN	If there happens to be an earth tremor — or a bolt of lightning — or a ferret crosses your path, they'd stop bringing things along you stupid idiot.	
CHREMES	A nice mess I'd be in if I couldn't find room to put my things down.	
MAN	You're afraid you couldn't find room? Don't worry. You could still put them down somewhere if you came the day after tomorrow.	795
CHREMES	What do you mean?	
	<i>He points to the audience.</i>	
MAN	I know these men. They're quick to vote and then refuse to abide by the laws they've passed.	
CHREMES	They'll bring their goods my friend.	
MAN	And if they don't? What then?	
CHREMES	Don't worry about it, they will.	
MAN	And if they don't? What then?	800
CHREMES	We'll fight them.	
MAN	And if they win? What then?	

Notes

- Line 780** Amongst the statues of the gods which have come down to us we have no clear examples of this particular pose although there is another reference to it in Aristophanes (*Birds* l.518).
- Line 791** Omens of this sort, both great and small, were taken seriously by the Greeks. There are numerous examples of them affecting the course of history. An earth tremor apparently caused the Spartans to turn back from Kleonai (Thukydides VI, 95).
- Line 799** The Man baits Chremes yet again quickly seizing hold of his words and turning them back on him. Here again Chremes is reduced to frustration.

CHREMES	I'll leave my things and walk off.	
MAN	And if they sell them? What then?	
CHREMES	To hell with you.	
MAN	And if I go to hell. What then?	
CHREMES	Good riddance.	
MAN	Do you really want to bring your goods?	
CHREMES	Yes. And I can see my neighbours bringing theirs.	805
MAN	Oh yes. I'm sure Antisthenes would make a contribution. He'd much prefer to sit on the pan for more than thirty days first.	
CHREMES	Damn you!	
MAN	And Kallimachos, the chorus master, what could he bring?	
CHREMES	More than Kallias.	810
	<i>He addresses the audience.</i>	
MAN	Here's a man who throws away his property.	
CHREMES	That's a hard thing to say.	
MAN	What's hard about it? As if we're not for ever seeing laws like this being enacted. Don't you remember the business about the salt?	
CHREMES	Yes I do.	
MAN	And the time we voted for the copper coinage — don't you remember that?	815
CHREMES	Yes. And a bad job for me that was. I sold my grapes and set off with my mouth full of copper. Then I went to the market place to buy barley. I was just holding out my bag when the herald cried out that they wouldn't take copper coins any more. 'Only silver is legal tender.'	820
MAN	And just lately didn't we all swear that there'd be 500 talents for the state from that two-and-a-half per cent tax that Euripides devised? And straight away everyone was praising Euripides. But when they looked at it carefully and it appeared	825

Notes

Line 806 For Antisthenes see note on line 365.

Line 809 Of Kallimachos we know nothing. Kallias inherited a fortune of some 200 talents. He was a notorious profligate referred to in other plays of Aristophanes and seems to have managed to dissipate almost the whole of his inheritance in a very short space of time.

Line 814 We know nothing of the decree concerning salt and little of the tax associated with Euripides (ll.823 ff.), perhaps the son of the tragedian. The reference to the copper coinage, however, refers to the difficulties faced by Athens in the last few years of the war. When the Spartans occupied Dekelea, it proved impossible for a time to operate the silver mines at Laurion, thus necessitating a move to copper coinage.

to be worthless and didn't meet the requirements then everyone was for tarring Euripides.

CHREMES It's not the same, my friend. We were in charge then but now it's the women.

MAN And I'll be taking care
by Poseidon, that they don't piddle all over me.

CHREMES You're talking nonsense. *[He turns to his slave.]* Pick up the yoke boy.

The heraldess enters from the right from the city.

HERALDESS All you citizens — this is the way it is now —
come on, hurry up at once to your leader 835
so that you can draw your lots and fortune
can tell you where each should go and dine.
The tables are stacked high with
all sorts of good things and set out ready.
The couches are piled with blankets and rugs. 840
They're mixing the wine in bowls and the perfume girls
are standing ready. The fish slices are being grilled.
They're putting the hares on spits. The cakes are baking.
The garlands are being woven and sweetmeats are being roasted.
The youngest girls are boiling up their soup pots 845
and Smoios, in there ready for mounting,
is licking the ladies' honey pots clean.
And Geron's there with his cloak and smart shoes on
giggling with a new young boy
his boots discarded and his threadbare coat cast aside. 850
Come on, the man with the bread
is ready. Just open your mouths.

The heraldess goes off to the right back to the city.

MAN Well then I'll be off. Why am I staying standing here when this is what the state wants?

CHREMES Where are you off to? You haven't given up your property. 855

MAN To the dinner.

CHREMES No you don't, unless they've lost their wits.
Not until you've brought your contribution.

Notes

- Line 833** Chremes' patience has come to an end. He has not been deterred by the cynical comments and orders his slave to prepare to depart. His departure is delayed, however, by the appearance of the heraldess.
- Line 834** Praxagora had announced her intention of appointing a heraldess (1.713). Arrangements have been made for the public dinner and the heraldess arrives to summon the people. Her speech parodies the style of the messenger in tragedy. In her first few words she sets the pattern of the new order in which all citizens — not just a few distinguished people — are being invited to the public banquet.
- Line 845** The heraldess has so far offered, in traditional language, a traditional description of a banquet. To this is now added the comic element with the reference to the antics of Smoios and Geron of whom we otherwise know nothing. The former has apparently made a start on the young girls while the latter is more interested in the boys.

MAN	But I will.	
CHREMES	When?	
MAN	It won't be me that's the hold-up my friend.	
CHREMES	What do you mean?	
MAN	I tell you there'll be others later than me bringing theirs.	
CHREMES	Are you going to go to the dinner all the same?	
MAN	Why ever not?	860
	Good citizens should assist the state in anything they can.	
CHREMES	And if the women stop you? What then?	
MAN	I'll charge then with my head down.	
CHREMES	And if they hit you? What then?	
MAN	I'll take out a summons on them.	
CHREMES	And if they laugh you down? What then?	
MAN	I'll stand at the door . . .	
CHREMES	And do what? Tell me.	865
MAN	I'll snatch the food as it's brought in.	
CHREMES	In that case come behind me. You there Sikon and you Parmeno pick up all my possessions.	
MAN	Come on I'll help you.	
CHREMES	Not likely! I'm afraid that when I'm right beside our leader putting the goods down you'll lay claim to them.	870
	<i>Chremes and his two slaves go off to the right carrying all the goods.</i>	
MAN	By Zeus, I need some sort of plan so as to keep the possessions I have and also to share somehow with that lot in the food. Of course — I've got it. I must be off to join the feasting without delay.	875

Notes

- Line 869** Throughout his conversation with the Man, Chremes has always come off worst. He has appeared as the respectable but rather too simple and trusting citizen. At last, however, in his final comment, he sees the trick which the Man had intended to play on him and manages to avoid losing all his possessions.
- Line 875** The Man does not tell us what his scheme is and we do not learn if he is successful in it since he does not appear in the play again. The fact that he has thought up some plan provides him with sufficient motivation for his departure to the feast and there is no need for us to know precise details. A totally different sort of scene rich in comic possibilities follows at once. If it had crossed the minds of any members of the audience that there was a loose end here, such thoughts would immediately be set aside as the audience is caught up in the brisk new action.
- Line 876** Here again (see note on l.729) the manuscript refers to a choral part. There is a blank stage but no requirement for a lapse of time at this point in the action.

*The man goes off to the right to the dinner.
An old woman comes out of the house.*

OLD WOMAN I Why don't the men come? It's past the time.
I'm standing here plastered with white lead
and with my yellow dress on to no purpose,
humming some song to myself
to see if I can have some sport and catch hold of
one of them as he passes. Come to my lips, you Muses,
with some Ionian love song.

880

A young girl appears at the window of the house.

YOUNG GIRL You've beaten me to it, you old hag, peeping out just now.
You thought that while I was not here
you'd strip my unguarded vines and get hold of someone
with your singing. If you do that I'll sing against you.
And if that's a bore for the audience
no matter since it's a cheerful comic matter.

885

The old woman produces a phallus.

OLD WOMAN I Go away and play with this. But you,
my darling little flautist, take your flute

890

Notes

- Line 877** Aristophanes now gives us a practical demonstration of the new regime and chooses for his purpose the theme of free love which Praxagora had expounded (ll.613 ff.). Some have seen this scene as a degeneration into the crudest kind of farce and coarse buffoonery, but we should not imagine that the Greek audience found this offensive in any way. Attempts have been made to see in this scene an attack by Aristophanes on promiscuity or even an attack on the general thesis propounded by Praxagora. It is possible to see it as the work of a misogynist ridiculing the possibilities of female emancipation. Such theories seem to be an attempt to provide a more intellectual conception of the play as a whole. The play is not a political platform or a social pamphlet. I prefer to see the scene as a more down-to-earth exposition of the theory which has been earlier expounded at a more intellectual level in the dialogue between Praxagora and Bleepyros. Aristophanes has presented his topic at two levels in order to comprehend the whole range of his audience. However, in the process, he has shown us that he is a master of wit as well as of coarse humour.
- Line 881** The Old Woman is waiting for a man to come along from the dinner. Praxagora had predicted this scene (ll.691 ff.) but the way in which it was expounded to Bleepyros is very different from the action that now takes place.
- Line 883** Ionian music was traditionally regarded as being sensuous. The appeal to the Muses for help is a parody of tragedy and nicely rounds off the opening remarks. The Old Woman must have cut quite an amazing figure in her yellow dress and with her mask hideously plastered in white lead. It would be obvious that she needed rather more than a sensuous song to ensnare a lover.
- Line 886** Stripping unguarded vines is a proverbial expression for a cowardly, underhand activity.
- Line 888** Here again a direct reference to the audience. We should not conclude from this that the audience might not like the sort of singing and slanging match which is promised but rather the opposite. It may well be that there was a pause here to invite the audience to shout out 'carry on' or some other remark denoting approval.
- Line 890** A scene of sexual innuendo and obscenity is portended by the immediate introduction of a phallus at this point.
- Line 891** A flautist was present to accompany the choral parts. As the text stands he would not have been required since the last choral interlude (ll.571 ff.) after which he would have departed. One might assume that he now re-entered the orchestra. However, if there was a choral interlude at line 876, he would presumably have stayed on after the chorus had left the orchestra.

	and accompany me in a song that's a credit to us both. If a man wants to have something good let him lie with me. It's not the young girls who have the skill but the mature women. She wouldn't be willing to remain as constant as I would with my dear lover. No, she'd fly off to someone else.	895
YOUNG GIRL	Don't bear a grudge against young girls. There is softness in their tender thighs and a bloom on their breasts. But you've been plucked and painted, old woman — a delight for death you are.	900 905
OLD WOMAN I	I hope your hole rots and I hope you lose your bed just when you want to be poked. I hope you embrace a snake on your couch when you want a lover.	 910
YOUNG GIRL	Oh dear, what will become of me? My lover hasn't come.	

Notes

- Line 905** The initial rounds on either side have been fairly straightforward propaganda. However, the last two lines of the Young Girl's first verse are a more pointed and personal insult preparing the way for the Old Woman's response which is both vicious and crude.
- Line 911** The Young Girl does not respond immediately in the same vein but instead laments a lost opportunity for love. Perhaps this is an overture to the Old Woman whom she addresses somewhat deferentially and ironically(?) as 'nurse' (l.915) in an attempt to return to the traditional order of things where she would not be subject to this sort of competition and abuse. On the other hand she may merely be singing the words of a popular tune of the time.

	I'm left here alone and my mother's gone off somewhere. Now I need say no more. Dear nurse, I beg you, get me Orthagoras. You'll find it's to your advantage. I entreat you.	915
OLD WOMAN I	Already, you wretch, you want to rub yourself up in the Ionian way. I think you're ready for a tonguing like a lesbian. Well you're not going to snatch away my playmate for yourself. You won't- do for me or rob me of my rights.	920
YOUNG GIRL	Sing as much as you want and keep peeping out like a ferret.	
OLD WOMAN I	I will. No one will come to you before me.	925
YOUNG GIRL	Not to my funeral anyway! That's a new one you old hag!	
OLD WOMAN I	No it's not.	
YOUNG GIRL	Well, what could be new to an old woman?	
OLD WOMAN I	It's not my age that will cause you problems.	
YOUNG GIRL	What will then?	
	Will it be your red and white make-up?	
OLD WOMAN I	Why continue the discussion?	
YOUNG GIRL	Why keep peeping out?	
OLD WOMAN I	Me?	930
	I'm singing to myself for Epigenes, my lover.	
YOUNG GIRL	Have you got a lover — I mean apart from Old Age?	
OLD WOMAN I	I'll show you — even you. He's coming to me soon.	
YOUNG GIRL	Well here he is then.	
OLD WOMAN I	You pest, its not you he'll be wanting.	
YOUNG GIRL	By Zeus — you bag of bones I'll slip off and he'll soon show you himself.	935
OLD WOMAN I	So will I. You'll see how much smarter I am than you. <i>The young girl draws away from the window and the old woman steps aside into the doorway so that the young man who enters from the right from the dinner does not notice them at first.</i>	
YOUNG MAN	I wish I could sleep with my girl and not have to poke a flat-nosed old hag first. A free man shouldn't have to endure this.	940

Notes

- Line 918** Both the ascription of the lines and the connotations of the Greek words are particularly obscure at this stage. We might take the name Orthagoras (1.916) as a reference to the lover, particularly appropriate since the first part of the word can mean 'erect'. Alternatively, and possibly more likely, it could be a reference to the phallus which the Old Woman produced at line 890 and which the girl apparently wants to use 'in the Ionian way' (1.919), i.e. for masturbation.
- Line 922** The 'playmate' as I have translated it here may be a reference to the phallus which she refuses to let the girl have. I prefer, however, to see it as a reference back to the lover whom the girl awaits (1.912). Thus the Old Woman at the end of the song is asserting her rights, namely first use of the handsome Young Man, and Aristophanes is preparing us for the scene which follows.

The old woman speaks aside.

OLD WOMAN I You won't like it, by Zeus, but poke you will.
This is not Charixena's day now.
According to the law you must
do this — we live in a democracy. 945
I'm off to watch what you're going to do.

She enters the house.

YOUNG MAN Oh God, I wish I could catch my darling alone.
I've come for her, tipsy and aching with desire.

The young girl comes forward to the window again.

YOUNG GIRL I've given that abominable little old hag the slip.
She's gone off thinking I'd stay inside 950
Well, here's the man we've been talking about.

She sings down to the young man.

Here, here, my dearest, here to me.
Come on and share my bed
all night long. A passion for that
curly hair of yours has got me properly stirred up. 955
There's a strange desire pressing down on me —
it's worn me away.
I beseech you, Passion, give me release
and see to it that he comes to my bed.

YOUNG MAN Here, here, 960
my dearest, hurry down
for me and open this door.
If you don't, I'll fall and lie here.
I want to lie on your breast
and beat time with your bottom. 965
Aphrodite, why do you drive me mad for her.
I beseech you, Passion, give me release
and see to it that she comes to my bed.
Yet what I've said is small compared
to my need. My dearest, I beseech you, 970
open up and kiss me.
It's because of you that I suffer.
My golden beloved, child of Aphrodite, the Muses' bee,
nursling of the Graces, face of Tenderness,
Open up and kiss me.
It's because of you that I suffer. 975

In the course of his appeal the young man has knocked frequently on the door. It is now opened and out comes the old woman.

Notes

Line 943 We know of a Charixena who was associated with erotic music. Probably the meaning is 'This is not the time for erotic little songs — it's action I want.'

Line 969 We may safely assume that, just as in the scene between the Old Woman and the Young Woman, here too there is some coarse activity, presumably centering on the sexually aroused condition of the young man which demonstrates his suffering and his need.

Line 973 This complex complimentary address is a parody of tragedy. Its effect lies both in its excessive length and its position as an endearment in what is otherwise a somewhat crude dialogue full of sexual innuendo.

OLD WOMAN I	Hey there! Why are you knocking? Do you happen to be looking for me?	
YOUNG MAN		Is that likely?
OLD WOMAN I	Well you were battering on the door.	
YOUNG MAN		Like hell I was.
OLD WOMAN I	What have you got a torch for then?	
YOUNG MAN	I was looking for a man from Anaphlystos.	
OLD WOMAN I		What man?
YOUNG MAN	Sebinos, the one you're looking out for I suppose.	980
OLD WOMAN I	By Aphrodite, you'll get it whether you want or not.	
YOUNG MAN	I'm not handling cases over sixty years old at the moment. I've put them off to some other time. I'm dealing with those under twenty.	
OLD WOMAN I	That was so, my sweet, under the old regime — but now you must handle us first.	985
YOUNG MAN	You can pass if you want according to the rules of draughts.	
OLD WOMAN I	But you're not dining according to the rules of draughts.	
YOUNG MAN	I don't know what you mean. I've got to give this door a knock.	
OLD WOMAN I	Yes — when you've given my 'door' a knock first.	990
YOUNG MAN	But I don't want a sieve knocked full of holes.	
OLD WOMAN I	I know you love me. You're just amazed that you've found me out of doors. Give me a kiss.	
YOUNG MAN	My dear, I'm terrified of your lover.	
OLD WOMAN I		What lover?
YOUNG MAN	The best painter of all.	
OLD WOMAN I		Who's that?
		995

Notes

- Line 976** The Young Man has been expecting that the girl would open the door. We may assume that considerable visual play was gained from the appearance of the Old Woman and the subsequent reaction of the Young Man.
- Line 978** A torch was customarily carried by those returning from a party. Praxagora had referred to the diners carrying torches on their way to assignations (1.692).
- Line 979** Anaphlystos was a deme of Attica. There is, however, a play on words in Greek here, the word for masturbation having the same root.
- Line 980** Here again as in line 979 we have a play on the name Sebinos where the verbal root means 'screwing'. Thus, allowing the *double entendre*, the audience might assume that in these lines the Young Man denies he is looking for female company (1.977), suggesting that he is capable of satisfying his own needs (the *double entendre* of Anaphlystos 1.979). He is certainly not waiting for a screw as the Old Woman is (1.980). However, that is what he is going to get as the Old Woman assures him but not with the girl of his choice (1.981).
- Line 987** We know nothing of the rules of this game — it may be a type of draughts or a type of dice. Apparently, however, a player could pass when it came to his turn.
- Line 988** The force of the Old Woman's comment is 'you didn't pass when it came to eating so you're not going to pas on this.'
- Line 992** The Old Woman tries a different tack, pretending that the Young Man's comments were merely to overcome his surprise at finding her, his true love, outside and ready waiting for him.

YOUNG MAN	The one who paints the pictures on the oil flasks of the dead. Get away — for fear he sees you outside.	
OLD WOMAN I	I know it, I know your wish.	
YOUNG MAN	And I know yours, by Zeus.	
OLD WOMAN I	By Aphrodite, my allotted protector, I swear I won't let you go.	
YOUNG MAN	You're mad, you little old hag.	1000
OLD WOMAN I	Nonsense. I'll take you off to my bed.	
YOUNG MAN	Why on earth do we buy hooks for our buckets when we could lower a little old hag like this and hook our buckets up from the wells?	
OLD WOMAN I	Don't poke fun at me, you wretch; follow me in here.	1005
YOUNG MAN	I haven't got to unless you've paid one fifth of one per cent of my value to the state.	
OLD WOMAN I	By Aphrodite, you must. I like going to bed with lads like you.	
YOUNG MAN	But I hate it with women like you. I'd never be persuaded.	1010
OLD WOMAN I	Well, by Zeus, this will force you.	
YOUNG MAN	And what's this?	
OLD WOMAN I	A law — according to this you must come to me.	
YOUNG MAN	Tell me what on earth it is.	
OLD WOMAN I	I am telling you. 'The women have resolved that if a young man desires a young woman, he may not poke her until he has first banged an old woman. And if he refuses to bang her first but desires the young woman, let it be permissible for the older women to drag	1015

Notes

- Line 996** The Young Man has replied sarcastically that the only person who wants her is the equivalent of the undertaker since she looks like a corpse and, if she is not quick, he will get her (1.997).
- Line 1002** The Young Man plays on the physical appearance — bent double with age — of the Old Woman. She is bent like a hook. Probably also the metaphor should be extended to her physical tenacity since she may well have grabbed hold of him at this stage (1.1001).
- Line 1007** The reference to a payment to the state is obscure. It is possible that there was a tax of this order on the transfer of property at this time.
- Line 1015** We may assume that the Old Woman reads out the decree at this point. That she should employ the formal language for presentation of a decree is in itself comic. The context of the decree with its slang references to sexual intercourse and the manner by which a man might be detained (1.1020) add to the effect.

Courage! Come on, you can crap inside.

OLD WOMAN II

YOUNG MAN I'm afraid I might do more than I want to.
I'll give you two sureties —
substantial ones.

OLD WOMAN II Don't give them me.
A third old woman enters from the right.

OLD WOMAN III Where, hey,
where are you off with her?

YOUNG MAN It's not me — I'm being dragged off.
Whoever you are god bless you
since you're not leaving me to be ground under.
He looks round.

O Herakles,
O Pans, O Korybantēs, O Twin Gods,
this one's an even bigger disaster than her.
He turns to the audience.

I ask you, what on earth is this creature?
Is it an ape smothered with white paint
or an old woman rising up from the dead?

OLD WOMAN III Don't poke fun at me. Follow me, this way.

OLD WOMAN II No, this way.

OLD WOMAN III I'll never let go.

OLD WOMAN II Nor will I.

YOUNG MAN You'll tear me apart, you hellish pair.

OLD WOMAN II You must follow me according to the law.

OLD WOMAN III No, not if another old woman, even more ugly, turns up.

YOUNG MAN If I'm done to death by you two first,
how will I get to that sweetheart of mine?

OLD WOMAN III That's your look out. You've got to get on with this.

YOUNG MAN Which do I knock off first to get release?

- Line 1063** The Young Man's anxiety has sexual rather than scatological overtones. He is afraid that he will have to do more than he wants to inside in terms of servicing the Second Old Woman.
- Line 1064** Once more the Young Man resorts to legal methods to win his release just as he had done with the First Old Woman (see note on line 1027).
- Line 1067** The Young Man does not at first see the Third Old Woman who surpasses them all in ugliness. We might suppose that he is on the point of being dragged inside and senses the presence of someone else only through hearing a voice. When he does manage to catch a glimpse of the newcomer his appeal for help dies on his lips. Here, as often in comic drama, mere reading of the play is a poor substitute for a performance. Only in a performance could the full comic possibilities be explored through gesture, pause and verbal delivery.
- Line 1068** In his distress the Young Man makes a lengthy appeal to a variety of sources which might be expected to help a man in such difficulties. Herakles was renowned for killing monsters; the Pans were the originators in men of wild fears — panic; the Korybantes were frenzied priests of Kybele; the twin gods, Kastor and Pollux helped men through dangerous journeys.

OLD WOMAN II	Don't you know. Come here.	
YOUNG MAN	Make her let me go.	
OLD WOMAN III	Come here to me.	
YOUNG MAN	If she'll let me go.	
OLD WOMAN II	I won't let you go, by Zeus.	
OLD WOMAN III	Nor will I.	1085
YOUNG MAN	You'd make rough ferrymen you would.	
OLD WOMAN II	Why?	
YOUNG MAN	You'd kill your passengers by dragging them about.	
OLD WOMAN II	Be quiet and come here.	
OLD WOMAN III	By Zeus, no — to me.	
YOUNG MAN	This is clearly like Kannonos' decree — I've got to shag while I'm tied up. How can I handle the pair of them?	1090
OLD WOMAN II	Easy — when you've eaten a bowl of truffles.	
YOUNG MAN	I'm done for. I've already been dragged near to the door.	
OLD WOMAN III	That won't help you I'll rush in along with you.	
YOUNG MAN	God forbid. Better get down to it with one horror than with two.	1095
OLD WOMAN III	By Hecate you've got no choice.	
YOUNG MAN	I've had it completely if I have to shag this old hag all day and all night and then, when I'm free of her, next this toad with an oil flask by her face. I'm done for, aren't I? Yes, I've had it by Zeus the saviour, talk about bad luck — to be shut up with these wild animals.	1100

Notes

- Line 1089** Kannonos' decree stated that if anyone should injure the Athenian people he should face the charge while in fetters and, if found guilty, should be put to death. The Young Man is fettered by the grip of the two old women while his fate is being considered.
- Line 1092** The use of truffles as an aphrodisiac is frequently met in comedy. The Greek word which I have translated as truffles is used of a variety of bulbous plants.
- Line 1093** The Young Man's lament is tragic in tone as he is dragged off to his fate. The fact that the second hag is winning the struggle and getting him near her door will not however lessen the sexual performance demanded of him since the Third Old Woman promises to join them in the house.
- Line 1098** Once more the Young Man's lament opens in tragic vein.
- Line 1101** It seems safe to assume here that the idiom is taken from the funeral preparations (see note on l.1030). The Young Man is repeating his first thoughts on seeing the Third Old Woman (l.1072): her skin is hideous — like a toad — and she looks like a corpse, with the traditional oil flask beside her.

But if all's up — as seems likely —
 sailing in here at the hands of these two whores,
 bury me at the very mouth of the harbour
 and set this woman up on top of my grave
 when you've covered her alive in pitch and
 poured molten lead round her feet up to the ankles
 to act as a substitute for an oil flask on top.

1110

*The young man and the two old women enter the house.
 Praxagora's servant girl enters from the right along with the chorus.*

SERVANT GIRL

What happy people. And lucky me.
 And my mistress, happiest of all.
 And you there standing at the door
 and all our neighbours and fellow citizens.
 And me as well, the serving girl —
 I've been anointing my head with perfumes,
 excellent ones, by Zeus. But far superior to
 all of these are the little jars of Thasian wine.
 They linger in your head for ages
 while all the rest fade and fly away.
 so they're easily the best — easily — by the Gods!
 Mix some neat wine. It'll cheer us through the night
 as we chose the one with the best smell.

1115

1120

She turns to the chorus.

Notes

Line 1105 The last few lines of the Young Man's speech are a direct appeal and address to the audience. They are paratragic in tone and the reference to a sailor's death and burial was probably particularly apposite in the minds of the maritime Athenians. The comic twist to the description of a hero's death is given when we hear that instead of an oil flask on his grave, he will have the Old Woman — covered with tar to make her waterproof and with her feet embedded in lead to make sure that she stays in a vertical position.

Line 1111 There is a further blank stage, but no lapse of time is intended at this point, before the final scene which winds up the play in jovial mood. The manuscripts do not help us in the identification of the characters. It has been suggested that the man who appears is Chremes and that he is late because he has been handing over his property and now receives his reward by personal summons to the dinner. I myself favour the view that it is Blepyros whose previous interests in women and food would be more in accord with this character. It is not explicitly stated in the play that the Servant Girl belongs to Praxagora. However, the description which she gives of her mistress in her opening remarks seems to lead us automatically to the conclusion that she is Praxagora's servant. It may well be that the heraldess who appeared at line 834 was also Praxagora's servant. If this were the case we would expect the audience to recognize her immediately, and there would doubtless have been considerable comic impact on the reappearance, in an exceedingly tipsy state, of a young lady who had appeared in such a formal rôle before. If we assume that the Servant Girl is Praxagora's it follows that the man is certainly Blepyros. If the man was Chremes it seems rather strange that we have references here to his wife, the servant's mistress, when we have heard nothing of Chremes' wife in the rest of the play.

The tipsy state of the Servant is clear from what she says. We might assume that it was even more clear to the audience from the manner of her entrance. Where we might have expected the man to send a servant to fetch his wife, we now find, under the new regime, a reversal of rôles and the woman sends a servant to fetch her husband.

Line 1114 At this point the Servant Girl refers to the chorus who have accompanied her.

Line 1119 The wines of Thasos and Chios are often named as the best in Greece. A fondness for drink on the part of the servants, and indeed of women in general, is a fairly common comic theme.

Line 1123 The Greeks usually mixed their wine with water but they did also on occasion drink it neat. Here the girl is so tipsy she confuses her instructions. Instead of 'mix the wine and water' or 'pour out neat wine' she asks for the impossible namely 'mix me a bowl of neat (unmixed) wine'.

	But tell me, ladies, where's my master — I mean the husband of my mistress.	1125
CHORUS LEADER	If you stay here we think you'll find him. <i>Blepyros enters with some young girls from the right.</i>	
SERVANT GIRL	Oh yes. Here he is on his way to the dinner. Oh master, happy man, happiest man.	
BLEPYROS	Me?	
SERVANT GIRL	Yes you, by Zeus, more than anyone. Who could be more fortunate than you when out of a total of more than thirty thousand citizens — only you haven't had dinner?	1130
CHORUS LEADER	It is a lucky man you're talking about — for sure.	
SERVANT GIRL	Hey, where are you going?	
BLEPYROS	I'm off to dinner.	1135
SERVANT GIRL	By Aphrodite, you're the latest of them all. Well, my mistress told me to collect you and these girls together and take you. There's some Chian wine still left and other goodies. So don't delay.	1140

Notes

- Line 1125** Because of the new regime the girl corrects the notion of her former relationship. She now belongs to her mistress — not to her master — and Praxagora is now not Blepyros' wife, rather he is Praxagora's husband.
- Line 1128** The chorus had not been very helpful in their response (l.1127). All they have suggested is that since the man she is looking for isn't at the dinner he must be at or on his way home. The tipsy girl completely misinterprets what is now going on. He is not on his way to the dinner—indeed he is coming from that direction. He knows his wife is busy in her new rôle and he is sneaking home with some girls he has picked up. On meeting the servant girl and the chorus he executes a sharp about turn and when the girl asks him where he is going (l.1135) he quickly takes up the suggestion that she had made (l.1128) by responding 'I'm off to dinner' (l.1135).
- Line 1132** Thirty thousand is the traditional number of Athenian citizens. It is possible to interpret the Servant Girl's comment in a variety of ways. She might be suggesting that he is fortunate because he alone has still got a sumptuous dinner ahead of him — for all the other citizens it is now over. Perhaps however, we have another example of her tipsy state of mind. She has gone around saying how lucky he is. 'Why am I lucky?' asks Blepyros. 'Oh yes you are', she replies, 'because you alone . . .', and here she pauses since she cannot think of any reason and ends not with a reason for his good fortune but with the only thing she can think of which differentiates Blepyros from all the other citizens, namely, the fact that he has not yet had his dinner. The comment from the chorus leader (l.1134) may be ironical or cynical.
- Line 1137** Praxagora is well aware of her husband's pursuit of young girls. His penchant is clear from their debate (ll.611 ff.). She has assumed that when he did not follow her he was chasing after some girls and would be intent on taking them home.

She turns to the audience.

And any of you in the audience who are on our side
and any of you judges who're not backing someone else
come along with us. We'll supply everything.

BLEPYROS Won't you speak to them all like a lady —
don't miss out anybody but willingly
invite old men, young men and boys?
There's a dinner ready for them —
every one of them — if they go home.
I'll be off to the dinner now.
I've got my torch handy too! 1145

CHORUS LEADER Why keep wasting time? Why don't you go
and take these girls? While you're on your way
I'll sing a song, a song for dinner.
I want to make a little suggestion to the judges —
the intellectuals should choose me after consideration of my intellectual
content. 1155

Those who enjoy a pleasant joke should choose me for my jokes.
So I'm clearly telling almost all of you to choose me.
Don't let the ballot order work against me
because I'm first on. You must keep all this in mind.
Don't break your oath. Make your choice of the companies fairly. 1160
Don't be like bad mistresses
who only ever remember their latest lovers.
Oh, oh, it's time,

Notes

- Line 1141** The Servant Girl now breaks the dramatic reality completely. Through her, Aristophanes makes his appeal to the audience and judges for the prize and this appeal is taken up at greater length by the Chorus Leader. From this point almost all pretence of dramatic illusion disappears and the actors move outside the drama and into the real world where there are judges to give prizes to the plays and an audience who are at a festival in which food, drink and general revelry played a very considerable part.
- Line 1146** The fact that there is no reference to women at this point has been taken as evidence that there were no women present in the audience at this time. This might be a reasonable assumption but it is a long way from being clear proof. The fact that Blepyros does not mention women may be because they have no influence on the judgement of the play and were very much second-class members in any gathering.
- Line 1148** This is a traditional joke. 'If you vote for me, I'll let you have a meal — the one your wife's preparing for you when you go home.'
- Line 1150** Blepyros does not go off at this point but moves towards the chorus to join in the final dancing. What is the torch? It might be an actual torch which the Young Man had brought in but had dropped at some point after line 978 in his confusion. Perhaps it has phallic connotations and refers to a gesture which Blepyros made with his costume. It is quite possible, however, that it is a reference to one of the girls he has with him — 'my flame' would be the English idiom — in which case the words would doubtless be accompanied by some exaggerated embrace.
- Line 1153** The reference may be simply to a song for the dinner referred to in the play. More likely, however, it has a double meaning and refers also to the meal which the players hope to get as a reward from the choregos for winning the prize at the festival.
- Line 1154** Aristophanes' appeal is catholic and is made not only to the discriminating intellectual but also to those who are quite the opposite. Because of the system of choosing the judges (see p.16) they might well come anywhere on this spectrum.
- Line 1158** It is from these words that we know the order of the plays was fixed by lot. Probably to be last on was preferred since, unless the play was bad, the playwright had the advantage of being more clearly remembered.

dear ladies, if we're going to do it,
to up and off to dinner. [*She turns to Blepyros.*] You step out too
in Kretan style.

BLEPYROS I am doing.

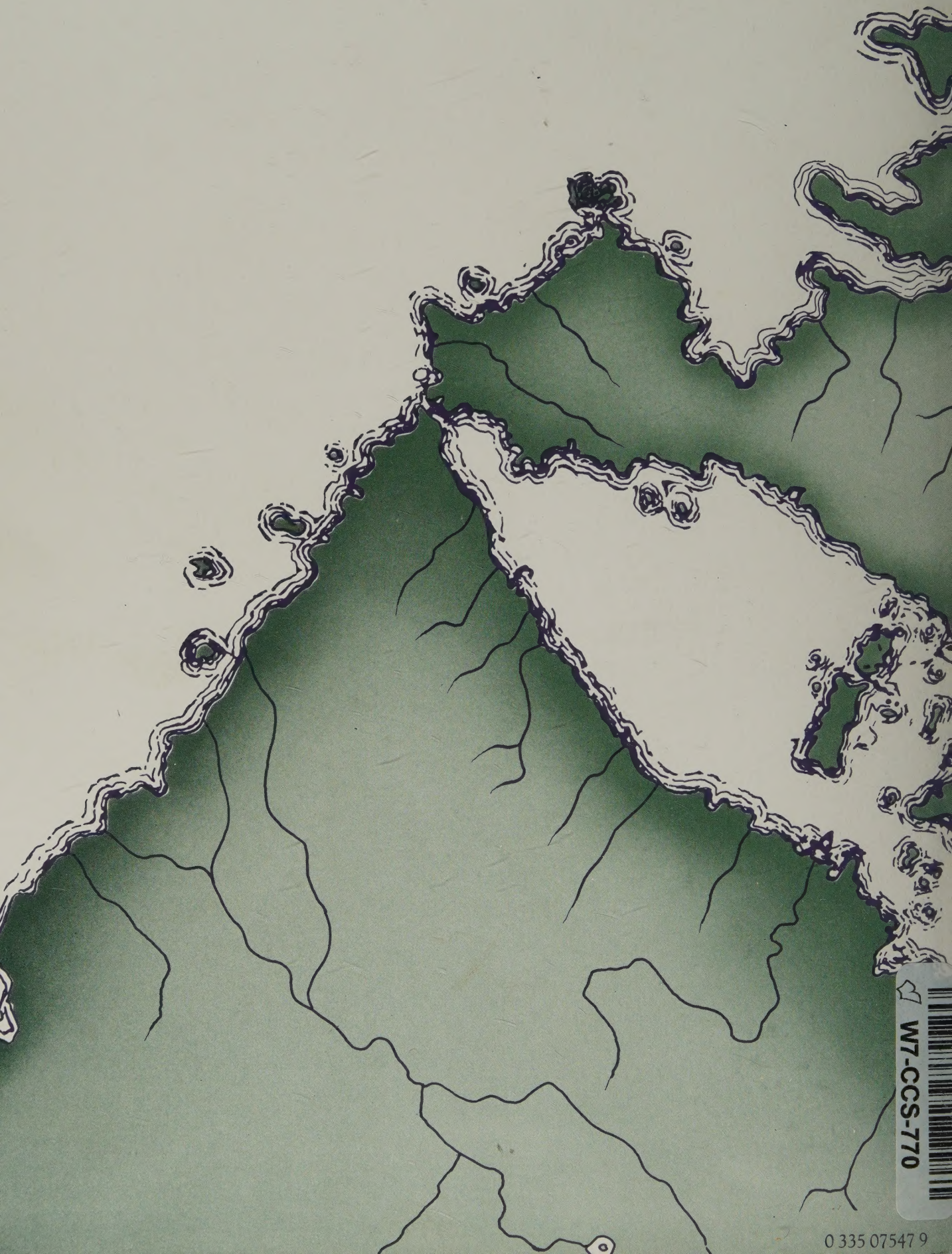
CHORUS And now you here
take up the beat with your nimble legs.
Soon there'll be served
a pan of sliced fish, shark, dogfish
heads, bits and pieces in vinegar sauce 1170
silphium oil, honey dressing poured on the top of it
thrush on blackbird, woodpigeon, dove
on a base of roast lark, wagtail
tender hare dipped in wine, boiled down gristly
wings. Now you've heard this 1175
come on. Quick. Get your hands on a honey pot.
Then hurry and get some
porridge to eat as a second course.

BLEPYROS I suppose they're stuffing themselves full.

CHORUS Step high to win, to win, 1180
we will be dining, to win, to win,
to win, off to victory,
to win, to win, to win, to win.
All depart to the dinner to the right.

Notes

- Line 1163** At this point the whole chorus break into the final dance routine. The inclusion of Blepyros in this (l.1166) doubtless added to the general hilarity.
- Line 1165** Precise details of Kretan dancing are not known to us but it seems that the dance demanded lifting up the legs. It might well, therefore, have been quite vigorous and possibly, when performed in comic dress, not a little obscene.
- Line 1169** This compound word covering almost seven lines is traditionally known to schoolboys as the longest word in the Greek language. It is a succession of dactyls – ω – ω – ω, probably intended for delivery in one breath, and it describes a dish of rich and tasty meats with accompanying spices and sauces. We might assume that the delivery of the word was used to great comic effect both in song and in dance. Probably the richness of the banquet was almost physically dinned into Blepyros as he tried to keep pace with the dancing. Certainly it is he who is exhorted to hurry at the end of the dance (l.1176).
- Line 1178** After the description of a sumptuous feast, Blepyros would not be expecting a reference to porridge which he might need as a supplementary or alternative meal if, since he is late, there is little or nothing left. This is the final break from the dramatic illusion. The reference to victory is a wish that the play might win the prize so that they might have their feast (l.1181) as a reward (see note on line 1153).



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